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WHAT I WANT FROM LIFE

*By E. G. Cousins*

**FILMLAND IN FERMENT  
I WILL NOT CEASE . . .**

*A Novel*





*"Feeling fit, fine, and worth attention"*

*WHAT  
I WANT  
FROM  
LIFE*

*by*

Gracie Fields  
Sir Cedric Hardwicke  
Dame Sybil Thorndike  
Charles Bickford  
Fay Compton  
Seymour Hicks  
Gertrude Lawrence  
Douglas Fairbanks, Jr.  
Florence Desmond  
Paul Robeson  
Merle Oberon  
Leslie Howard  
Jessie Matthews  
Leslie Henson  
Tallulah Bankhead

*Edited by*

E. G. Cousins

*London*  
**GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD**  
*Museum Street*

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1934

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
UNWIN BROTHERS LTD., WOKING

## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

MANY of us have the haziest ideas on a subject of the most vital importance—the question of what we want from Life. It has therefore occurred to me that it would be valuable, as well as interesting, to have the views of these fifteen men and women whom we know to have made a success of their careers.

They need no introduction from me; so, beyond acknowledging with gratitude their co-operation in the preparation of this book, there is nothing more for me to do but to stand aside and let them have their say.

E. G. COUSINS

AUTHORS' CLUB, LONDON

*November 1934*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE portraits of Miss Gertrude Lawrence and Mr. Charles Bickford are reproduced by courtesy of Messrs. Wardour Films, Ltd., those of Miss Jessie Matthews and Mr. Leslie Henson by courtesy of Messrs. Gaumont-British Film Corporation Ltd., those of Miss Merle Oberon and Mr. Paul Robeson by courtesy of Messrs. London Film Productions Ltd., that of Miss Gracie Fields by courtesy of Messrs. Associated British Film Industries Ltd., and that of Miss Tallulah Bankhead by courtesy of Dorothy Wilding.

The chapters by Miss Gracie Fields, Miss Jessie Matthews, and Mr. Charles Bickford have already appeared in *Film Pictorial*, and the Editor desires to express his thanks to that periodical for permission to republish them here.

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
I WANT TO DO NOWT..... GRACIE FIELDS	9
I WANT TO MAKE TWO BLADES OF GRASS GROW WHERE ONE GREW BEFORE	
SIR CEDRIC HARDWICKE	15
I WANT MY FAMILY TO GROW	
DAME SYBIL THORNDIKE	22
I WANT TO FIND OUT..... CHARLES BICKFORD	29
I WANT CRUELTY TO STOP..... FAY COMPTON	36
I WANT NATURALNESS.....SEYMOUR HICKS	43
I WANT TO REMEMBER ..... GERTRUDE LAWRENCE	50
I WANT TO TELL YOU ..... DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, JR.	57
I WANT TO BE MYSELF ..... FLORENCE DESMOND	64
I WANT TO BE AFRICAN.....PAUL ROBESON	71
I WANT ROMANCE..... MERLE OBERON	78
I WANT TO BURN MY POWDER-PUFF	
LESLIE HOWARD	85
I WANT TO BE TWO PEOPLE..... JESSIE MATTHEWS	92
I WANT TO KEEP HEALTHY.....LESLIE HENSON	99
I WANT EVERYTHING.....TALLULAH BANKHEAD	106

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

GRACIE FIELDS .....*Frontispiece*

## FACING PAGE

CHARLES BICKFORD ..... 32

GERTRUDE LAWRENCE ..... 50

PAUL ROBESON ..... 72

MERLE OBERON ..... 80

JESSIE MATTHEWS ..... 96

LESLIE HENSON ..... 104

TALLULAH BANKHEAD ..... 106

# *I want to do nowt*

by

GRACIE FIELDS

AY, you may open your eyes, but it's true. Did you think I was a demon for work? Did you picture me being chivvied off the set at the end of the day, begging, "Please, Mr. Director, let me do one more shot!"?

If you did, you were wrong. It's a pretty picture, but it's out of drawing. I don't want to work. I want to do nowt.

I'm bone-idle. I was born idle, and you don't get vaccinated with the itch to work, or catch it like you catch measles. I work because I have to, and that's the only reason why I've ever worked at all.

As a youngster I started in a cotton-mill in Rochdale. Well, a mill-lass's life is grand for them that likes it—you get up at six every morning and you knock off at five of an evening, and in between you're working in an atmosphere made up of one part air and three parts cotton-fluff—and when I say *working*, I mean it.

Well, to a lass that hated work as instinctively as I did, you can imagine for yourselves that this life

didn't appeal to me very much; so I started looking about me for something a bit easier, and being able to dance and sing a bit I managed to get a job in a juvenile theatrical company on tour; anything better than the mill—that was the idea.

I soon found, to my grief, that it meant working just as hard as I used to do at the mill, only the work was shifted farther on in the day—I didn't start so early, but I finished much later.

And all for a shilling a week! Ay, that was what I earned—but not what I was paid, because there were all sorts of fines for things I'd done and hadn't done . . . and very often the shilling looked a bit silly by the time I came to collect it.

But I couldn't go back to the mill. That was the snag. Even if I could have got my job back—and I suppose I might if I'd set my heart on it—there was something about my new life that had got under my skin; the theatre had taken hold of me, as every new step I've ever taken has got hold of me. I've found *there's no going back*—for me at any rate.

So I thought I'd try going forward, to see if that was any easier. I began to learn to do what the leading ladies were doing—special dances, solos, and all that—and I found I could.

But I also found it gave me still harder work—extra practising, longer hours; that didn't suit me, so I tried to edge into the back row of the chorus again, where I could take it easy and have a bit of fun with the girls—and let the star get on with it.

And I wasn't even allowed to do that.

"Hi, none o' that," the manager'd say; "you Graacie—you coom reet oot here an' do your stoof" . . . and out I had to go—me that loved work so much I was willing to lie down beside it.

So it went on. Each time I'd learn to do the next job higher up, thinking it would be easier, and each time I had to keep on at it whether I liked it or not—and it never *was* easier.

And now I've come to the films. I don't know why. I never wanted to. I was never much interested in pictures. I have to pinch myself every now and then to realize I'm a film-star at all.

It means nowt to me, and that's the truth. In the theatre you know where you are—by the feel of the audience.

And here's where I don't agree with a lot of the pros I've worked alongside—comedians, singers, and such. I've seen 'em in the Provinces, sometimes—Edinburgh, Birmingham, Sheffield—coming off the stage crying because it was a bad audience.

"Bad audience?" I've said. "The audience is all right. It's never the audience that's wrong—it's *you*."

And I've gone on, feeling fit, fine, and worth attention, and got the feel of the house and got 'em round to my way of thinking in a verse and a couple of choruses.

Audiences are a bit like performing wild animals. You've got to handle 'em right, and you've got to

mesmerize 'em, and above all you've got to make 'em understand you're not afraid of 'em.

Go on the stage looking as if you were apologizing for being there at all, and they'll have no mercy on you. You mustn't even stumble, ever so little. They'll be on you like a flash. Just keep your head and do your stuff, and you can *make* 'em like you—at any rate, you'll know whether they're liking you or not.

But pictures! That's another matter. You stand in a blaze of light among a crowd of men and women—half of them you don't know what they're there for—and you're given two or three lines to learn.

You learn them—and then they're altered and you learn them again; and when you come to speak them, you're just beginning to get warmed up to the spirit of the thing, and the director calls "Cut!" . . . and you've got to begin at the beginning and go through it all again, only slightly different this time.

You don't know whether the audience will like it or not. When you speak a line that's supposed to be funny, everybody all round you is concentrating on their jobs and looking as if they daren't smile for fear their faces will crack.

Even when there's a crowd in the picture, and they laugh at your jokes, you know it's because the Assistant Director has waved his arm twice—upward for "Start laughing," downward for "Leave off laughing." It's all bloodless and mechanical and

strange. I haven't got used to it yet, and I don't suppose I ever shall.

But I ought to feel at home, by rights, because here I am back in the mill again—right where I started. I have to get up at six o'clock, only instead of knocking off at 5.30 as I did in Rochdale I work till eight; and instead of cotton-fluff it's incandescent carbons and dust and grease-paint; and instead of a shilling a week it's . . . well, it's a bit more. Or so the income-tax people tell me.

And instead of hard work it's harder work; at any rate, more tiring.

Yet in the mill we only got one week's holiday in the year—Wakes Week—and didn't feel the need of more. I suppose it was because in that week we really did rest from our job.

Oh, we didn't lie about in the sun all day. Mill-hands on a trip to Blackpool or New Brighton or Scarborough keep going the whole time; there's plenty to do.

But we got the beat of the machines out of our heads and the cotton out of our lungs, and went back to the mills ready for anything.

Now I have a whole month away every year—have done for the last five years; I go abroad, to the South of France or somewhere like that.

But do I rest? Can you rest when you're thinking what you're going to give your audiences when you go back, that they'll like as well as what you've given them before?

I can't. I never get *away* for a minute; and I don't rest at all.

What I want to do is to knock off work for six whole months, to see if I really can stop working—no pictures, no theatre, no gramophone recording, no broadcasting. I don't know whether I can, but I want to find out.

I want to see whether I really *can* "do nowt" when I get a chance.

But I want you to understand me. My idea of "doing nowt" is not to lie on a luxurious couch eating chocolates. If I did manage to stop working—at my real work—for a while, there's plenty of other things to do, same as there was at Blackpool.

I don't believe anyone worth his bread-and-butter can ever give up work entirely. However much we feel we'd like to sit with our hands in our laps watching other people working for the rest of our lives, when it comes to the point we couldn't do it.

If I left the stage and the screen I should very likely take up housework—and probably find that the hardest of all.

But to be able to relax—to be able to rest when resting-time comes, and store up energy just as you have your car-batteries charged—that's what I mean when I say "I want to do nowt."

*I want to make two blades  
of grass grow where one  
grew before*

by

SIR CEDRIC HARDWICKE

HAPPY those of my fellow-authors in these pages who are able to indicate their aspirations in a modest word or two! I seem to require a baker's dozen to label mine; but the aspiration itself is modest enough.

Man is a pioneering animal. I don't know how far we are justified in assuming this to be an evidence of superiority; there may be a good deal to be said for the mental attitude of the philosophic cow, which apparently accepts this green earth as, if not the best of all possible worlds, at least an accomplished fact, and never bothers her pretty head about altering it.

However this may be, Man, for better or for worse, does want to alter it.

He comes into the world with that itch existing in embryo; frequently in adolescence it asserts itself in a burning desire to change the whole fabric of

society; and although the would-be reformer usually finds that his dreams of a perfect State have taken form and been given a fair trial and been scrapped while Civilization was still young he never wholly relinquishes his ideals.

They may be harnessed to a remarkable force of character, and he becomes a Mohammed or a John Knox or a Lenin; but it is frequently when they are applied to his ordinary daily avocation that they are of the greatest value.

The large-scale reformer must throw down before he can build up; the tiny, apparently insignificant reformer can alter, and improve, and adorn, without any grand preliminary destruction; and when he does that in his hundreds of thousands we have a progress no less sure than that effected by the bloodiest revolutionary.

The words pioneer and reformer are in some respects practically synonymous. The explorer who penetrates into unknown Africa has his heart set on gingering up the Dark Continent, if not for its sake, at least for his own. He wants to leave things different from the way he found them—possibly with a view to improving the lot of the natives, possibly with a view to improving his own bank-balance. Whatever the motive, the intention remains.

The reformer, on the other hand, forces his way into Darkest Tradition with the same laudable intention. He may burn with a desire to make things pleasanter for his fellow-man, or he may be con-

vinced that things couldn't be any worse for a spot of alteration and might be better, or he may merely want to get his name into the papers ; in any case he wants to alter, and to his way of thinking improve, conditions as he found them.

Let me emphasize the possibility that he may be mistaken ; his change may be for the worse ; he may find apparent chaos and leave actual chaos ; but at least he is sincere, and it is to him and his kind that the world owes any advancement it makes.

The whole history of civilization is a study in leaps and pauses. For a year, ten years, a century, mankind will stand still, content to do as father and grandfather did. Then something will ferment in the soul of the race, a great reformer or pioneer or prophet will arise, and all the little reformers will do their tiny bit towards pushing along to the next stage in our development.

I want to be one of these reformers. I am content to make a virtue of necessity and modestly disclaim any desire to be a great reformer ; I am resigned to being one of the myriad little ones ; but I propose to be a very good little one.

My aim is to leave the theatre and the screen better than I found them.

It requires no great genius to do this. The great genius, of course, can do it, has done it . . . *must* do it. The famous actor-manager to watch whom was "like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning" could not possibly leave the theatre quite as he found

it; Irving couldn't; Belasco couldn't; Komissarjevsky couldn't. Genius brings the metal of the theatre to a white heat and then stamps its own imprint upon it—and it is never quite the same again.

But it can be done by the exercise of more mundane qualities. Sincerity, industry, conscientiousness, intelligence, devotion—any or all of these, resolutely applied to the service of the theatre, can add their quota towards its betterment.

One doesn't ordinarily think of it. It's only when, in a case like this, one is asked to analyse one's aspiration that the thing really takes shape. Otherwise an actor simply plugs away at his job with an aim slightly above the estimable ambition of paying his landlady and earning nightly applause, and hardly troubles to consider what that aim may be.

So there is hardly a conscious and deliberate attempt at reformation, at pioneering. We who care for the theatre do not strike a noble attitude and say, "The traditions handed down to us by the great actors of a bygone day shall be safe in our hands."

Instead, we turn up punctually for rehearsals. We go to bed immediately after the show (sorely against our inclination) in order to be fit for to-morrow night. We behave with a certain circumspection, incumbent upon the less transitory members of a profession which was as recently as in the days of Good Queen Bess described officially as "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars," and is still suffi-

ciently elastic to include any street-walker or shop-lifter who cares to adopt it in the dock.

This is not a spectacular service; but it is permanent, and there is boundless satisfaction in the assurance that the profession which is our adopted father and mother, our Promised Land, our farm, our workshop, and our club, will be none the worse for our membership of it and may (if we are fortunate) even be considerably better.

An institution like the Theatre must have its ups and downs, its Sloughs of Despond as well as its Elysian Heights; and the same is true of the film-world. Imagine the satisfaction of finding either in a state of depression, and being instrumental in lifting it to prosperity—as, for instance, Alexander Korda has done in the field of film-production.

He found the British screen in a state that might be reasonably described as sticky, and by his filmic genius, his enthusiasm, his industry, and his personal magnetism he has been largely responsible for its renascence. There have been equal opportunities in the theatre. Henry Irving found drama suffering from stilted speech, and introduced the slurring of inessential words and phrases. Gerald du Maurier went a step further with the adoption of a naturalistic manner which was the result of a superb technique but which is frequently confused by his admirers and imitators with mere carelessness. Dame Sybil Thorndike has proved that high tragedy can be divorced from bombast and wedded to conviction.

Seymour Hicks has succeeded brilliantly in the almost impossible task of rendering Gallic farce in terms of British humour; Bernard Shaw found audiences dozing and tweaked them into wakefulness.

In all these cases and a hundred others there were the opportunity and the man or woman; whether the opportunity made the man or *vice versa*, or whether they were merely coincidental, is a matter of conjecture; the important thing is that these people found a certain aspect of the theatre in a certain state and altered it—demonstrably for the better.

It may not fall to many of us to find a state of affairs to which our peculiar talents may be applied with spectacular results; but spectacle is not the main or even a very important aspect of the most successful efforts.

It was inevitable, when Mussolini arrived at sufficient strength of will and vigour of body to recreate his beloved Italy, that the world should watch breathlessly. Garibaldi and Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Delano Roosevelt found similar conditions of world-interest. Their campaigns were dynamic, dynastic, almost cosmic.

But none of these reformers could have done a thing without the assistance and backing of the millions of little reformers who had only been waiting for someone to set the ball rolling; their goodwill and aching muscles enabled Mussolini to

muscle-in, as it were; the instant response of the people of the United States to the arduous conditions imposed upon them by Roosevelt indicates that the will to reform was there, latent, awaiting a leader.

It's latent everywhere. Let a Minister of Transport evince a real determination to reduce the number of road deaths per diem, and you find motorist and pedestrian alike eager to adopt any hampering and complicated specific he may conceive.

Mankind *wants* to improve conditions, *wants* to reform abuses, *wants* to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before. If (God sustain him) a fellow happens to be in a job which precludes any idea of such advancement, of human progress, you will frequently find that his leisure hours are devoted to a hobby in which this often subconscious urge *does* find scope.

If, by my efforts in the theatre, the theatre continues its gradual advancement as a social, economic and national asset, I shall be satisfied. Is it too much to ask?

# *I want my family to grow*

by

DAME SYBIL THORNDIKE

READING this heading, you will probably picture me sitting, like Sarah, yearning for increase.

But there are other kinds of growth besides numerical growth. There are mental, moral, spiritual, and physical growth—and they are enough to go on with.

I am not what would be called a domesticated person; my roots are too firmly in the Theatre for that; true domesticity implies putting the home and the care of the home first, and I don't see how an actor could do it.

But I am a firm believer in the home and in the family. Indeed, it has been a great support and comfort to me, by reason of its being a sort of microcosm.

And now I have to explain *that*.

I am at heart—very much at heart—an Internationalist. That is to say, I believe a rational arrangement of the affairs of mankind can only be arrived at by international co-operation.

Well, nations are big things to juggle with. I

would never dream that it would be within my powers to attempt such a feat, however exalted my station—especially when I watch the heartbreaking failure of the most brilliant and famous world-politicians and statesmen to evolve order from the prevailing chaos.

But the politics of a world of nations are only an extension of the principle of the politics of a single nation where there is party government; it consists of the clash and the reconciliation of conflicting interests.

Similarly, the party contains the conflicting interests of various constituencies; and the constituency of various boroughs; and the borough of various cliques; and the clique of various families.

It all comes back to the family, the smallest unit; and the family is a microcosm of a world of nations.

You can manage a microcosm where you can't manage a world of conflicting nations.

Not that I claim to be able to manage *my* family! They would hoot with laughter at the idea. It would be more correct to say that I manage *about* them.

The Victorian mother *managed* her family. As far as was permitted by her husband, who was the Patriarch, or He-Tyrant, she constituted herself the Matriarch, or She-Tyrant.

The art of managing a family in those days was simplicity itself. You merely forbade anything that you didn't consider quite nice, and commanded whatever behaviour you thought was right, and

severely punished disobedience either of omission or commission; and the only two ways you could possibly fail in your job were by either making your penalties too light or else having your children walk out on you.

In the first case you were condemned for spoiling them; in the second you were sympathized with for owning that possession "sharper than a serpent's tooth . . . a thankless child."

That was the obvious way to manage the family—by force—because it was the way to manage the country, or the working classes, or the army, or international affairs. Might was right, God was in His heaven, and all was right with the world.

Nowadays it isn't nearly so simple.

We—or at any rate a great many of us—don't believe any more in the efficacy of force to settle arguments. We believe war to be an outworn solution of the world's problems—if indeed it ever was a solution at all. And, if might is no longer right in the world at large, the same is true in the home.

So instead of managing our children we manage about them (you recognize that expression—"How do you manage about John and Ann?"); and I must say it's a great deal more interesting, even if it is also more complicated.

We are not a quarrelsome family; but our household is an absolute hotbed of argument. Casson meal-times are notorious as occasions for a violent

clash of opinion, such as would have been unthinkable a hundred years ago. Art, religion, politics, sport . . . every arguable subject is made a battleground, and almost every argument is inconclusive, and almost every battle tails off into an honourable peace when one of the protagonists has to get back to work.

Our children use each other as whetstones for their wits, and frequently their parents also are pressed into the same useful service.

John, the eldest of the family, a naval lieutenant and a pilot in the air-arm, hotly debates militarism with his mother, whom he rightly suspects of leanings towards pacificism. Christopher, in repertory, argues fiercely with Ann, on tour, as to the comparative merits of the two forms of dramatic training. Lewis Casson engages his elder daughter Mary on a vexed question of technique. "And through it and over and under it all, sounded incessant—" not the waterfall, but the light skirmishing incidental to the proper business of a meal.

Contrast this with the glumly silent meal-times of three generations ago, and you have, I think, a solution in embryo of the world's problems.

Differences of opinion are quite as much a matter of experiment as of conviction. We have an idea, and we roll it round in our minds, and it looks pretty good to us; but we are not quite content to trust our own judgment.

We therefore trot it out for inspection by our

fellows; and as it was our idea first, we feel obliged to defend it against attack. Hence the family argument.

In a bygone day it was considered easier by parents to suppress the idea with a tyrannical "That'll do, children" than to suffer argument; but it didn't end there. The suppressed idea fermented, mixed with a sense of injustice, and became an injurious inhibition.

Inhibitions are as dangerous in members of a nation as in members of a family. A wise local government in London permits free speech in Hyde Park—a safety-valve through which has probably been expended harmlessly much explosive gas that might otherwise have gone to the construction of anarchists' bombs.

So it is with nations. The small country suppressed and sat upon breeds revolution and wars of revenge and all kinds of abominations; a free country is a happy one and a law-abiding one. It is only when we have no freedom that we wish to transgress the bounds even of Freedom itself.

This, then, is my ideal: a family absolutely free from artificial and extraneous bonds, and limited only by those regulating factors which are partly instinctive and were partly acquired at an earlier age when complete freedom would have resulted only in chaos; these regulations—ordinary good manners, a regard for the amenities of social life, a certain respect for elders, and a sense of fair play—

afford quite sufficient deterrent without any necessity for anyone playing the "heavy parent."

Then what, you will probably ask, is the function of the mother in the home, when the children have grown up?

Well, I think I have said enough to show that I am opposed to the matriarch idea, if it must be accompanied by a parade of power; but the matriarch has her uses.

She represents continuity; there is value in a sense of relationship with the immediate past, inasmuch as it breeds a sense of responsibility, of "background," of security. Also, it suggests relationship with the next generation to come.

She also has an opportunity of vindicating her sex in the eyes of her sons; you will not find much amiss in the mutual attitude of brothers and sisters when the attitude of mother and sons is on a footing of mutual regard and respect and tolerance.

But the main function of the matriarch is one upon which I dare not descant too much for fear of "giving the show away." It is the "hidden hand" type of management of her menfolk which every woman exercises; it is what every family needs; and it is *What Every Woman Knows*, as Sir James Barrie indicates in his play of that name. Incidentally, women have accused *him* of "giving the show away" in that play, but they need not worry; few men could appreciate its inherent truth; the play was written for women to chuckle over together.

Such influence as I may possess is exercised in the direction of encouraging my family to grow—to grow in physical strength, to grow in mental perception, to grow in moral stature, so that when the time comes for them to leave their home and my orbit they may have acquired the qualities and the graces which will not only best fit them for the hurly-burly of the fairground of Life, but which will also best help to reduce that hurly-burly to terms of decency and order and beauty.

This cannot be achieved without a sacrifice of certain cherished preconceptions and prejudices, but the sacrifice has been comparatively painless, and eminently worth while. It has also been great fun; and if my ambitions for my family's growth are fully realized, it will be a great deal more than that.

And as to numerical growth, why not? I hope they will all be married—and I should adore being a grandmother!

# *I want to find out*

by

CHARLES BICKFORD

YOU have to go back a long way in your life to think of a time when you didn't want to *know*—beyond the days when you lay on your back and played with your toes and wondered . . . dimly . . . what they were.

Philosophers tell us that the chief end of man is Happiness, and consequently his chief activity is the pursuit of happiness.

That goes for the kid in the crib. He wants to feed and sleep as well, but these are mere bodily functions. The main activity of his *mind* is the pursuit of happiness, and the thing that's going to make him happy is just finding out.

He doesn't lie still and stare at his toes and wonder. He grabs 'em and pulls 'em about and worries 'em, puts 'em in his mouth and chews on 'em, smacks at 'em to see if they'll smack back.

A little later, when he gets to crawling about the room, maybe he finds the coal-box. Is he going to sit still and wait for Nanny to come and explain coal to him? No, *sir*! He chews it, rubs it all over

himself, sits on it, flings it across the room. Then, even if it tastes bitter and feels nubbly, he's happy. He's found out.

Most people lose this itch to find out as soon as they grow up; some even before. They're willing to believe what they're told—and I'll admit it's easier, at that; but somehow it doesn't satisfy *me*. I want to *know*; and I want to find out for myself—to smack at Life to see if it'll smack back. If it's bitter or nubbly, I want to know that, too.

That's what made me an engineer; I wasn't content to watch wheels going round and not know *why*. That's what made me an actor; I wanted to see the theatre world from inside. I also wanted to know what it was like to play opposite Garbo, so I came into the movie racket.

I want to know how people live. During the war I was in the United States Navy. I thought I'd see something—you know the old gag, "See the world through a porthole"?

Believe me, that was just how I saw the world! Whenever we came into port, I'd be confined to the ship for something or other I'd done or hadn't done . . . and you can see mighty little of the world through a porthole.

You'll have heard, maybe, that I'm always getting in bad. They think it's just plain cussedness, but it's all part of my guiding plan. When I wanted to know what an officer would look like if I busted him on the nose, I'd bust him on the nose to find out. Same

with the trouble I've had now and again in films. Most folk put it down to the Irish blood in me—or maybe my red hair.

But I've kicked myself plenty when I've thought of the opportunities I've missed for seeing the world. I want to see it all, but not from any Cook's magic carpet. I'd rather be sweeping the carpet, if that'll show me how the other sweepers make out.

I've made a lot of money in the last few years. Acting for the movies isn't my only "gainful occupation" as the income-tax authorities put it. I own two or three businesses, and I sell a lot of stories in Hollywood too, though not under my own name.

But I haven't got the regular Hollywood ambition to "retire when I've made my million." I use my dough to make me foot-loose.

My family's provided for, so that if I passed on to-morrow they'd be none the worse; and I'm free to follow "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—which, to me, means just finding out.

When I landed in England and they asked me "What made you come here?" I told 'em "Money!" But that was only half true. I came partly to see how films were made here, and partly to see how Englishmen live. I've seen 'em in *Ciro's*, and I've seen 'em in the Ring in Blackfriars Road, and I begin to understand why England is such a hotbed of Conservatism—if you can use the word "hotbed" for a thing that doesn't grow, but just exists.

Sovkino (the organization that controls films in

Soviet Russia) has asked me to direct a couple of films over there. If I do, it'll be because of the chance to see Russia.

I'm interested in Communism. I have theories about it. I believe in a few years from now the whole world will have adopted it, each country to the extent and in the form that suits it best; and the last to adopt it will be England—the last stronghold of Conservatism.

With this in my mind, I'm naturally interested to know what's going on in Russia. How's Russia making out? Who'll tell me that—truthfully? Books? Capitalist papers? I know just how tightly the Press is muzzled, and to me a half-truth is no more use than a plain lie.

Even if I went to Russia as a tourist—what then? I'd be taken round in a car to see certain specially selected "sights," and I'd learn exactly nothing. But if I go there to work, to live among the people, surely I can find out what it's all about?

I don't hold any brief for Soviet Russia—yet—because I don't *know*. Being an American I like America best, but I don't know it either, any more than any Englishman I've met knows England.

So that's got to be put right, too. I'm going to know America.

When I get through with seeing Russia, I'm going back to New York, and I'm going to land on Manhattan, and I'm going shopping.

After the manner of film-stars, I have eight auto-



*"I'd bust him on the nose—to find out"*



mobiles in my garage in California, for family use; but they'll stay there, and I'll buy me a little old Ford from the junk-pile near the hot-dog stand just off Broadway, for eighty bucks . . . and I'll see those United States. Maybe it'll take six months. Maybe five years; that doesn't matter. I'm going to find out.

I'll be recognized, you think? It's true if I start to walk down Broadway or Regent Street I have the autograph-hunters to reckon with; and if I stepped out of a fleet of Packards into Eagle Pass, Texas, or Wewoka, Oklahoma, Main Street would be thick with rubbernecks inside of a minute, and I'd only have myself to blame. But no one's going to look if I step out of a battered old flivver; and by the time a stray fan *does* recognize me, I'll be halfway to Cripple Creek, Colorado, or Bernalillo, New Mexico.

All knowledge is man's for the asking, and I want it. I'm not content to look at the sky and think "Those are stars." I want to know their names, and who put 'em there, and what makes 'em shine. When a fellow called Einstein hatches a Theory of Relativity, nine hundred and ninety-nine men will say "Great guy, this Einstein!" and sink another stein of beer. The odd one wants to know what it's all about. Guess I'm odd.

Some time ago someone offered to sell me an island in the Indian Ocean. An Englishman had owned it and lived on it as king. He didn't even use money—traded copra and pearl-shell with the schooners,

and used goods as currency, with a system of barter. Seventy miles from the mainland, but near other islands. I bought it.

I haven't seen it yet; but some day when I get round to it I'm going to buy me a schooner and visit my island; I'll use it as a base, and go all around from there, and find out how *that* part of the world lives and functions.

If, as seems likely, Communism is established in America before then, and my fortune is worth so many million dollars or roubles on paper and about the price of a can of beans in hard cash, I won't buy any schooner; but I'll ship in someone else's, as deck-hand or cook, and I'll still find out; and knowledge, once you've got it, is a thing no one can take away from you.

When I reach my island, I won't

*Sit on the po'ch wid ma pipe in ma han',  
An' fan ma'se'f wid a tuckey-wing fan.*

I'll work.

Maybe I'll work out a scenario for a film of Rudyard Kipling's *The Man Who Would be King*, and later produce it—if I can persuade Kipling to let me have the rights; that's another thing I'll be interested in—his reaction when I ask him that.

Speaking of Kipling, he once said

*. . . For to behold this world so wide  
It never done no good to me. . . .*

I guess it must depend on the fellow that beholds

it. It certainly does good to *me*; the more I can behold, the more I learn, and the happier I am: Man's chief end . . .

In my experience Kipling was on much safer ground when he wrote (in his *Sestina of the Tramp-Royal*):—

*It's like a book, I think, this bloomin' world,  
Which you can read and care for just so long,  
But presently you feel that you will die  
Unless you get the page you're readin' done,  
An' turn another—likely not so good;  
But what you're after is to turn 'em all.*

That's what I want; to turn 'em all.

# *I want cruelty to stop*

by

FAY COMPTON

**M**Y want is a negative one; I want cruelty *not* to be; but I want it in a positive way.

I loathe and detest cruelty.

To an Englishman the word means bull-fighting. However exhilarating he may find that sport in Spain, he would be scandalized if it were even suggested for our humanitarian country, where bull- and bear-baiting, cock-fighting, and kindred enjoyments are merely an evil memory.

Foreigners, he realizes, are different. The English, Heaven be praised, are a nation of sportsmen. Fair play is our motto . . . and a great deal more in the same strain.

Let's see how far he is right.

This is such an enormous subject to cover in the limited space at my disposal in this book that we can easily get lost in it if we don't follow a definite system of inquiry.

So let's start fair. What *is* cruelty?

Says the dictionary "Indifference to, or delight in, another's pain or suffering."

That covers a fairly wide field. It also suggests that there is a certain amount of cruelty nearer than Spain.

If, like the Fat Boy in *Pickwick*, I wanted to make your flesh creep, I could do it quite easily. There is enough well-corroborated evidence available to arouse the whole conscience of the nation, if it could be broadcast. Fortunately some of it is broadcast, through the medium of newspapers; and every time a particularly revolting case of cruelty is brought to light the public is shocked into saying "Tut-tut! Dear me! Dreadful, dreadful!" before turning to the football news.

And every time anyone says "Dreadful!" *meaning it*, we are a step, if only an infinitesimal step, nearer sanity.

Cruelty is a disease—in some cases an active, in others a passive disease; sometimes a disease of individuals, sometimes a disease of nations; but in any case it is curable, and, like all diseases, will in time be cured.

But the process is too slow; we must hurry it.

"Indifference or delight" says the dictionary. It's interesting to realize that the negative attitude is usually found in the duller, more primitive mind, and the positive in the evolved, highly strung, sensitive person, which indicates that positive cruelty is not an attribute of the "lower orders"—as our grandparents called the people who didn't carry visiting-cards.

Indeed, the lower we go in the human scale and the animal kingdom the less in evidence we find positive cruelty. The kingly tiger that plays cat-and-mouse with a wounded animal for the fun of the thing has no counterpart among the insects, or birds, or fish. Certainly they are ruthless; but they don't, so far as we can discover, delight in the sufferings of their victims.

One particularly sinister aspect of cruelty is the extreme thinness of the borderline between cruelty from indifference and cruelty for pleasure; so that in the next few pages you will probably find me drifting from one department to the other and back almost without noticing it.

Of course, a large proportion of cruelty is unthinking; for instance, quite frequently an inspector of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children will come across the case of a child who is starving, racked with disease, or suffering intense pain from neglected sores, and encounter only surprise on the part of its parents, who are too besotted to realize or too unimaginative to appreciate what the child has had to endure; and the same is true of cruelty to animals.

According to N.S.P.C.C. reports, a very large proportion of cruelty to children is due to drinking, which either reduces parents and guardians to a state of callousness akin to mental deficiency, or else goads them to savage acts of punishment or retaliation without any proper realization of the effects.

We highly civilized humans of 1934 cannot con-

gratulate ourselves that this cruelty to our own young (and, whether deliberate or neglectful, *we are the only animals to indulge in it*) is lessening.

Fifty years ago, in the first five years of the Society's work, there was a grand total of 1,521 cases—an average of 304 yearly. This year the Society celebrated its jubilee by inquiring into *over forty-four thousand* cases. The mind reels at the thought of the aggregate of child-suffering represented here.

Figures and statistics frighten most people to death, so I won't quote any more. But when you read in the paper of one case of cruelty which has happened to fire the imagination of some reporter by its "news-value," think of the other forty-four thousand per annum that never find their way into the newspapers at all.

Two important facts have been proved conclusively by the N.S.P.C.C.'s investigations. First, that no section of the community is free from offences against children, and it certainly isn't a question of income. And secondly, that the public as a whole is opposed to anything that would injure a child.

In that case the public as a whole must be roused to active protest—and it's only through such institutions as the N.S.P.C.C. that this can be done.

When we come to "blood sports" we are on more puzzling ground, for it is not the brutal slum-dweller but the moneyed, cultured flower of society that runs foxes to an exhausted death or has them torn to pieces by dogs; takes a friendly old deer out in a cart to an appointed place and turns it loose

to be chased—possibly to death, but certainly to an agony of terror; releases rabbits or hares—the most timorous of creatures—in places where there is hardly a hope of escape, to be chased by dogs; hunts an otter for four or five hours continuously.

The peak of all blood-sports is the kill; if it were not—if exercise and the improvement of blood-stock for cavalry purposes were the chief consideration, as we are told—drag-hunts would be the rule, and the killing dispensed with; but dragging is too tame a sport for the lord of creation whose battle-cry is “What a beautiful day!—Let’s go and kill something.”

So the fox and the hare are torn asunder, and the red deer is eviscerated, and kindly normal men and women who would smack a child soundly for tormenting a cat stand by and watch these horrors with evident enjoyment. There is something here even more disquieting than the stupidity of the drunken navvy who beats his children. The latter is a throwback to an animalistic past, when a primeval creature would vent its anger on another; this killing in sport, with “neither haste nor hate nor anger,” is a phenomenon of the present, that approaches unpleasantly close to sadism.

These very sportsmen would be the first to condemn (if they knew about it) the catching of *fifty million rabbits a year* in Great Britain, by steel-toothed traps which catch and crush the victim’s legs and hold it for hours in agony. That’s a beastly business; no sport in that; but when you can watch the terrified

beast growing weaker and weaker, and actually see the foremost hound make the snap which tells the quarry that all hope is vain—why, that's British sport.

And you'll forgive me if it makes me sick.

There is nothing new in the pot calling the kettle black. As long ago as 1516 Sir Thomas More wrote in *Utopia*:—

What sort of pleasure is it that men find in seeing a dog run after another? . . . But if the pleasure lies in seeing the hare killed and torn by the dogs, this ought rather to stir pity, that a weak, harmless, and timid hare should be devoured by strong, fierce, and cruel dogs.

And yet this same Sir Thomas, in the Middle Temple, had a young student flogged and racked until his joints were dislocated, for reading proscribed books.

This brings me to the most unpleasant part of my indictment; we no longer rack young men till their joints are dislocated, in the sacred cause of Learning—but we perform the same office for dogs and cats in the same cause—only now we call it Science.

If the young sixteenth-century student had been racked under an anaesthetic and then awakened to his pain, we should hardly abate our detestation of the crime; yet the great defence of vivisection is that by the provisions of an Act of 1876 the animals are anaesthetized during the actual operation—though it must be apparent to everyone that intense pain and suffering occurs when the poor creatures “come round.”

I don't propose to harrow your feelings here by dwelling on the more nauseating cases which the National Anti-Vivisection Society has authenticated ; on the work of the learned Mr. Joseph Barcroft, for instance, who has carried out an experiment on a cat in which a celluloid window was placed in the animal's body so that its spleen might be observed while the cat was made to walk a treadmill ; who fixed dogs' and cats' spleens outside their bodies and then kept them alive and conscious.

Or the sufferings of dogs inoculated with a horrible disease called typanosomiasis, which literally wastes them to skin and bone.

Or the process of semi-smothering conscious cats whose liver has been exposed, in order to ascertain that "the production of sugar from the liver by asphyxia can be effected in a number of ways."

Or experiments on monkeys, which drove them mad so that "they bit themselves severely, two chewing off the end of a finger and one the whole skin of a forearm."

Or animals purposely given fits, so that they dashed about their cages screaming or rolled over in convulsions.

I feel that if I did dwell on these subjects you might be prejudiced against these white-coated heroes who are exposing themselves to the horrors of virulent sadism in the sacred cause of Science.

Besides, you might not enjoy it.

# *I want naturalness*

by

SEYMOUR HICKS

**H**AVE we all gone completely crazy since the war? Or what other possible explanation is there for the orgy of unnaturalness we've plunged into?

Everything's sham; sham silks, sham complexions, sham professions, sham amateurs, sham marriage, sham leather, sham eyelashes, sham religion; we live and move and have our being in an atmosphere as false as the heart of a villain of melodrama. And, Heaven help us, we seem to enjoy it!

I don't. I find it stifling and stultifying. You don't either—unless you're young enough to have known no other. And if you do, you shouldn't.

With most of us who have reached years of appreciation, the enjoyment of this welter of unreality is in itself a falsehood. We hate it, and we haven't the pluck, or the energy, or the perception to drop it—or snap out of it, as the Americans say.

I blame the war, partly. Quite suddenly, during the course of that sham solution of the world's problems, a great many good fellows—and girls too,

bless their hearts—were yanked out of the state of life to which it had pleased God to call them, and pitched neck-and-crop into a state of life to which it pleased the Government to call them—a very different thing.

Don't mistake me; I think they acquitted themselves remarkably well. I take off my hat to the thousands of "temporary gentlemen," both for their gallantry and their adaptability. We owe them an everlasting debt.

But they were a tragedy, just the same.

The curtain didn't ring up on *their* real tragedy until after the Armistice—when they were ready to be absorbed back into civil life.

They were gentlemen, bearing the King's commission. They had handled men. They might have to go back to being bank-clerks or shop-assistants or nobodies, but in their leisure hours they were still second lieutenants with a wound-stripe and an M.C. ribbon on the decaying tunic in the attic; and before very long, as the glamour receded, the Second Lieutenant became Captain, and the M.C. a D.S.O.

They made-believe—not only to the world but to themselves; but there were others whose pretence began long before the Armistice. The duchess who put a huge red cross on her ample bust and an extra rope of pearls behind her third chin and became a hospital matron. The dug-out general who won the war all the way from Boulogne to

Etaples. The society débutante who suffered nervous breakdown through doing war-work at the rate of half-an-hour's flag-selling a week. . . .

There wasn't enough safe and showy war-work to go round, so people had to invent it—and we developed our taste for sham which has never left us.

Of course there was plenty of sham before the war; the terrible wax fruit of our Victorian grandmothers; the sham modesty that draped table-legs in trouser-like festoons of damask and sent girls into matrimony thinking that babies were found under cabbages; and certain classic American shams, such as Kentucky Colonels and wooden nutmegs.

But the war gave the merry game of make-believe a hefty shove along, so that nowadays it's difficult to know whether the very ground we're standing on is real or synthetic or (thanks to Einstein) merely relative.

The Theatre is full of it. Why can't we be natural, on the stage as well as off? Why must we strut and bombast and gesticulate and dramatize our least emotions?

There are some actors who never stop acting. I'll swear they even act in their baths, to the soap-bubbles, and when they pull the plug out they bow, taking the "Gwllrp" for applause. The only place where they don't, can't, or won't act is on the stage.

When I meet the kind of actor who places one

hand in the bosom of his astrakhan-collared coat and launches out on the speech beginning "Ah, laddie," I pick up my umbrella and run. I know he last had a walk-on at Harrogate in '98, and I know equally well that he's going to treat me to a dissertation on the art of acting—if I'm not quick.

The Americans, who have so enriched our vocabulary, have an expression "Oh, be yourself, be yourself!" I believe if we adopted it in practice it would make us the greatest nation on Earth.

We waste such a lot of precious time acting for each other's benefit. There are some people, of course, who have been doing it so long that they've actually convinced themselves.

The pukka sahib, full to the neck with *chota-hasri* and whisky-pegs, who has never been nearer to India than a day ashore at Colombo; the insouciant frequenter of the Riviera, who talks glibly of "shemmy" and "the tables," and takes on occasional run down from Monte to the Lido . . . in Hyde Park; the deep-sea fisherman whose dab off Southend becomes a tarpon in the South Seas after the second round of drinks . . . all these people believe implicitly that what they're telling you is true.

They're dupes of their own imagination; and, to a lesser degree, aren't we all?

And the pathetic thing is that we don't deceive anybody except ourselves. The girl who has laboriously coaxed her hair into looking like a bunch of brass wires, cheats herself into thinking that she

appears a natural blonde, when as a matter of fact it wouldn't deceive a brass-moulder. The chorus-girl who hangs about outside the stage-door hoping to be taken for a star may bag a ten-year-old autograph hunter, but not often; but she never gives up hope.

Half of it's just rank snobbery, and all this damned B.B.C. accent comes under that head. The great thing is to pretend we were at Eton and Balliol, whereas we were probably lucky not to be at Borstal and Pentonville.

What the devil does it matter where we were educated? Or, for the matter of that, how? You can't make up for a lack of education by sporting a Marlborough tie; and you can't make up for being a "dumb cluck" (God bless those Americans!) by boasting of your education.

Ben Jonson, nose slightly in the air, spoke of the "little Latin and less Greek" enjoyed by his shabby actor friend Will Shakespeare; yet Will managed to find a way.

Greek! What, in the name of all that's logical, does it *matter*? I know no Greek, and I'm certainly much happier for it. I care nothing about the Augean stables—I'm much more interested in what the Aga Khan's got in his; and I don't want the newspapers to tell me, either.

Let's get down to brass tacks. *Why* do we pretend so much, to ourselves and each other? *Why* do we make ourselves out to be something we're not?

The answer is easy. As a race, we suffer from

inferiority complex. None of us are as handsome, or as brilliant, or as important as we'd like to be, so we adopt a thousand-and-one painstaking devices and subterfuges to try to deceive each other; and the time taken up by all this nonsense is just so large a slice out of the time we're allotted for living.

It's exactly as if a nation of short men and women all stood on butter-tubs to impress each other; they might look more commanding, but locomotion would be a trifle difficult; and nobody would be deceived.

The problem could be solved by all of us getting down off our butter-tubs at once. Some would be a little taller than others; but we should all be *ourselves*, which, after all, isn't such a bad thing to be.

Consider the complex mechanism that has made *ourselves*—the essential self of each one of us. Heredity, environment, education, opportunity, ambition, scruples, inhibitions, mischances . . . surely there's sufficient guarantee of individuality there without the necessity of adding false whiskers or a false past!

I want to get rid of all this . . . *bunk*. I want to get back to Nature.

Of course, you immediately think of nudist colonies and grated carrot—and of both with a slight shudder of distaste.

Well, there's such a thing as *galloping* back to Nature, and it seldom works. The various Back-to-Nature movements are usually galloping movements.

They want to undo in a day the harm done in the course of several generations, which is simply impossible; in fact, it's worse than useless, because it's usually so self-conscious that in itself it's a kind of sham. The galumphing nudist resumes his trousers in the evening and is convinced he's a new Adam; he's like Ye Olde Garden Suburbs that try to be Tudor and only succeed in being jerry-built.

No, what we have to do is to *tend* in the direction of simplification; to stop wearing patent leather that lets in the wet. Let the bank-clerk *be* a bank-clerk, the cricketer *be* a cricketer and not a journalist, the advertisement *be* an advertisement and not disguise itself as a "home hint."

Let's all gradually start afresh, level, genuine, honest, and authentic; and for God's sake let's try to remember that, old school tie or no old school tie, we shall all smell alike in our coffins.

# *I want to remember*

by

GERTRUDE LAWRENCE

I OUGHT to warn you, I don't know anything about writing an article, so I'm just going to put down what I think as if I were writing a letter, and probably end it "Yours affectionately." And I'll pray that somebody will do something about the punctuation before it gets into print!

Of course a number of *my* wants lie ahead, in the future, like other people's, but also many of them lie in the past. You may think we already *have* what's in the past, but that's only true *if we remember*. What we forget, we lose.

I don't want to lose anything. I want to retain not only the charming and lovely memories, but also the harsh and ugly and bitter ones. This may seem odd, but there's a very good reason for it.

The charming memories of course everybody wants. Some night that doesn't cut an inch of ice in history, but is tremendously important because of a moon shining on a lake, and the scent of jasmine, and distant violin-music. The first time an audience



*"Haven't we practically scrubbed floors together?"*



showed signs of liking you. An exchange of confidences with your first bosom friend.

All these are part of your treasure, and if you lose any of them you lose a gem that can only be replaced with paste. They're useful not only for whiling away an odd ten minutes, but also because they put heart into you. They fit you for what you have to do. You can always remind yourself that there are as pleasant moments in the future as you've had in the past.

You know what fun it is to look at a family album. To say "Heavens, didn't I look a funny little shrimp in those days?—but it was when I was wearing *that* frock that I ate my first oyster, and I wouldn't have changed places with the Shah of Persia or even the woman selling balloons in Kensington Gardens."

I want my memory to be like a family album—as complete, and as easy to get at. I want to be able to draw on it for quietness and certainty at anxious moments, for healing at painful moments, for hope in moments of despair.

I've heard it said that one chief reason why the English are such a stable race is their attics. Every house has one, and every one is crammed full of things which are finished with, outgrown, demoded, put aside, in all probability never to be used again, but which their owners wouldn't part with for anything. They're usually a link with some more prosperous period, or a humbler but happier time, or with a dead relative, or perhaps merely with a sentiment.

It all looks like lumber to other people, but to the owner it's treasure. My memories might seem like lumber to you, and yours to me, but . . . would we part with them?

However, there's another use for memories—the harsher ones I mentioned. I believe a great many people deliberately throw these away. I don't.

They too have a place in the family album, or in the lumber-room. Your first real lover's quarrel—a terrible, calamitous thing, that looks slightly ridiculous now, about the size of a molehill (funny how it's *shrunk!*). And the terrible sinking feeling in your middle when you realized that you didn't know where the next meal was coming from. And finding that someone you trusted had been disloyal to you. . . .

I don't believe in resurrecting all these just for the sake of tormenting oneself with the tiny stabs of pain they give (some of them dulled almost to nothing now). I believe in keeping them—to use as a surveyor uses his survey-marks—to get your sense of proportion right.

That sense is fatally easy to lose. Quite often I meet someone I've known for years, and I say "Oh, how *are* you, darling?" and receive in return a cold "How do you do?" And I feel like saying "Dear, *don't* be like that with *me!* Haven't we practically scrubbed floors together in the theatre?"

But she's forgotten it . . . because she doesn't want to remember.

Some poet or other (but I wouldn't know who!) once wrote about men "climbing on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things." Considering that stepping-stones don't climb, I suppose the good man meant stairs, and if so he got it right; unfortunately some people get it wrong, and think they can climb by stepping on their dead *friends* to higher things—which, besides being unpleasant, is impracticable.

This is the kind of thing *I* mean by "our dead selves." Here's what happened to a self of mine—a fifteen-year-old self.

I was in a touring company that was playing in Shrewsbury when the manager skipped, and you know what *that* means . . . or rather, for your own sake, I hope you don't. In this case it meant that we were left flat, without even enough money to pay our hotel bills.

Life looked pretty gloomy to fifteen-year-old me, but the landlady, a kindly soul, said I might stay on till something turned up provided I'd lend a hand in the bar—which I was very glad to do.

Of course I was chaffed a good deal by the men because my training for the stage hadn't included pulling beer-pump handles as beer-pump handles ought to be pulled, and I used to fill the glass three-parts full of froth, so that the customers would say "I'll need a ladder to get down to me drink, miss!" But they were very good-natured about it, and I managed to "get by."

Then the next company reached the town (touring was a more flourishing venture in those days) with *The Rosary*. They wanted a girl to sing "My Rosary" in front of the curtain before the show, and someone said, "There's a pretty nifty little barmaid down at the 'Red Lion'—she's had stage experience; why not get her?"

So they got me, and I put on a nun's habit and sang "My Rosary" before each performance, and then scampered back to my bar, and the whole audience used to come down to the "Red Lion" after the show to see the actress pulling beer-handles, which was good for trade.

I don't suppose I enjoyed that experience as much as I would now; but it's marvellous to look back on, and it's only one of dozens.

I want to retain all that, because with its help I can also retain my balance and my sense of proportion.

Then there's still another good reason for remembering, but it's rather more complex; it belongs to the inner galleries of our minds, where everything isn't quite so clear-cut and obvious.

For some reason or other (I suppose—though I haven't the foggiest idea what that reason may be) we like to be haunted. Not by actual spooks, of course, but by memories that pluck at our sleeves—

*Those awful voices o' nights*

*That whisper "Old man, come back."*

Some of the finest poetry, the loveliest music, has

been written under the influence of an emotion like that. It must have taken absolute heart-break to have inspired *The Londonderry Air*, and something very like it to have made Yeats write *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*, or Rupert Brooke *The Old Vicarage, Grantchester*, or Patrick Macgill *They Danced in the Tavern*, or Violet Jacob *The Wild Geese*, or Stephen Vincent Benét *American Names*. They're simply throbbing and pulsating with longing—a longing that is pain. Yet they're enchanting to read.

It's just the same with our own memories. We couldn't put them on paper with such magic as to appeal to other people; but to us they're poignant, and their poignancy gives us very much the same kind of pleasure as those haunting songs and poems do.

These memories we keep to ourselves. They are nobody's business but our own; nobody else could appreciate them, simply because we can't express them. They're the richest jewels in our treasure-house, the dearest junk in our lumber-room, the pictures that we keep in a special, private album.

But don't imagine that I want to live in the past. On the contrary, I want the past to live in me; and I want to reach out into the future, to collect always more memories to sustain me when my collecting days are over.

To my mind there is no old age so pleasant as the kind summed up in the phrase "lavender and old lace"—when all experiences are blended into a

misty, fragrant whole, a thing of half-tones and pastel shades and subtle flavours and sweet dignity.

And at the end I want to be like the dying French marquise who settled herself back in her pillows, crossed her ivory hands on her breast, and sighed "Well, it's all been very interesting!"

*I want to tell you*

by

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, Jr.

HONESTLY, I do want to tell you. Not because I think it's a particularly desirable thing to do, but because I've been asked to, and it seems churlish to refuse.

But I find I can't.

It isn't that I don't *know* what I want from Life. Subconsciously I know very well. And it isn't that I usually find difficulty in expressing myself, because I've been at some pains to train myself to put my thoughts and ideas down in black and white.

But this question beats me.

I've used the word "subconscious," which is generally the signal for an inquiry into the psychology of the subject.

Have you ever recovered from an anaesthetic, and been asked what you had dreamed, or seen, or imagined while you were "under"? You knew, but you couldn't describe it, because there were no words to describe it with.

The apt words, if there are any, don't come ordinarily, when the subject is as vital as this. They're

a different set altogether from those you would use to describe a racing-car, or a frosty cobweb at sunrise, or the death of a hero. Or rather the actual words are the same, but their grouping and use derives from somewhere outside our normal consciousness.

Sometimes it's called inspiration, and I'm certainly not inspired in this respect! Sometimes it's from drugs, as it was with Coleridge when he wrote *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*; unfortunately I don't drug. Sometimes ill-health makes a writer more receptive to ideas "out of the blue," as Keats was when he wrote about his "perilous seas in faery lands forlorn"; I am a hopelessly healthy person.

There was nothing very outlandish about these concepts. But they could never have been described in a humdrum, pedestrian way. Or rather it wouldn't have been any use so to describe them, because such words wouldn't have conveyed the desired impression.

Similarly, I feel that no words at my command can convey *exactly* my aspirations—which, in fact, are instinctive rather than reasoned. So I feel it better not to attempt it.

Besides, I have a theory about too much exposure of one's ideas and ideals. It does something to them—causes some subtle chemical change. And this is true of many aspects of life besides ideals.

I think it's a pity to reduce everything too ruthlessly to terms of words, and figures, and common

sense. We can easily overdo the common sense in life—at the sacrifice of glamour.

I believe in glamour. In a minor sense, it may be said to be one of the things I want from Life. I wish we had much more of it—glamour, romance, the thin, soft haze of fantasy that cloaks the harsh, ragged corners of life and makes it enjoyable instead of endurable.

Certainly don't let's live in a fool's paradise. Such a life is bound to have an awakening. It's fatally easy to fall asleep on a cloud and wake in the mud. But there's also such a thing as a fool's hell—a condition in which all the strictly unnecessary factors of existence are stripped off, leaving stark, uncompromising realism.

That is called Facing Up to the Facts. Sometimes it's truthful, but more often it's misleading because facts have a way of varying with circumstances.

I sincerely believe that the restless modern pursuit of harsh reality, of grim fact, is making us, as a race, less happy.

Civilization is continually improving our material conditions. More people have an easier time than at any period of history. Luxury is no longer enjoyed by the few at the expense of the toiling many.

But are we the happier for it? I very much doubt it.

In the Middle Ages men and women may have had a harder time, but they were happier. There was more gaiety, more music and song and feasting—not necessarily in the sense of guzzling more food, but

of eating and drinking gaily and companionably. That is the essence of feasting.

Nowadays practically the last stronghold of glamour is in the theatre and motion pictures. Everything else has been reduced to a three-dimensional state, as intriguing and enthralling as suet-pudding.

Even sport has gone the same way as everything else. Cricket has become a matter of international politics. Football depends on club finance and the transfer system. Baseball has known one of the most outrageous scandals in the history of sport. Racing boils down to the mathematical calculation of odds.

One by one all the institutions which used to contribute to "the gaiety of nations and the public stock of harmless pleasure" are being stripped of their glamour in the course of our insensate craze for "reality."

If only one knew what reality really was, there might be some sense in the quest. Reality is Truth. And Truth lies . . . at the bottom of a well.

Nowadays our scientists can estimate to a millionth part of a cubic inch how much water is in that well after one-sixteenth of an inch of rain has fallen. But they get no nearer catching a glimpse of Truth.

In fact, the more they figure and calculate, the more intangible she becomes.

It's so with our inmost thoughts. The more we chase and worry and pry and investigate, the more elusive they are. We know they exist. We know in-

instinctively that they're sufficiently strong and formulated to guide us through life. But we can no more prise them out and cast them down on the scientist's table for dissection than we can explain why we are so loath to do so.

The people who are so vociferously eager to debunk everything and everybody do us a poor service. They are cynics, whose own illusions have been shattered, and they hate anyone else to have any. They know that by switching off the rose-tinted limelight and switching on the bright white light of stark realism they will deprive us of that which they themselves can no longer enjoy.

It makes no difference whether they do it from a misguided sense of duty or from just plain cussedness. The mischief is done.

Life for most people is harsh enough, and cold enough, and cruel enough without these qualities being continually paraded before them. Every now and then a politician rides to the polls on the slogan "Hands off the people's bread!"—or their beer, or their prayer-book, or their recreation. Any broken-down buggy will do as a vehicle to the polls.

I would say "Hands off the people's illusions!"

After all, the time to debunk will come when we are *certain*, not before. Here's an example of what I mean. For the last hundred years or so the scientists have been trying to disprove the existence of God, and to reduce all Creation to terms of molecules.

Now, quite suddenly, these arch-debunkers realize

that there is something behind the molecule—something sitting calm and still and infinitely remote, but intensely interested.

If they had succeeded in debunking God—which, in plain fact, is what they were trying to do—it would have produced something like chaos in the world. And, as they now admit, it would have been a false alarm.

So let's be very cautious in declaring that *this* idea is an illusion, that *that* one is a worn-out superstition.

Grope, by all means, for Truth, but grope with sensitive fingers, pushing veils gently aside, not tearing them. The bloom is easily rubbed off the peach—but not all the science and research of a machine age can put it on again.

It would have been easy enough for me to have burked the issue—to declare that I wanted fame, or wealth, or ease, or genius. Or I could have demanded some world-condition, some change in civilization that would make it easier for me to get what I want.

But I know in my heart that it wouldn't be true. I know that whatever the conditions may be, it doesn't make any material difference to our development, which must be the particular interest of every one of us.

There is a good deal of elemental truth in the dictum "Life ain't holding good cards—it's playing a poor hand *well*." Quite apart from the zest of the thing, it's a splendid exercise for the muscles of the spirit.

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, JR.

And now I've put much more of my real beliefs on paper than I intended to. But behind it there are still caverns that I propose to leave veiled in the glamour of a decent obscurity.

One last plea. If we seem to dream, don't wake us, lest like the young King in *The Immortal Hour* we die saying "Give me back my dreams!"

# *I want to be myself*

by

FLORENCE DESMOND

**I**SN'T it an extraordinary thing that we should want a thing—really want it—and then go and throw it away for the sake of something we want less?

That's what a great many of us do. That's what I've done; only I hope it isn't too late to undo.

I want to be myself; Heaven knows there are enough things, and enough people, trying to prevent us from being ourselves. Any man, any girl, finds that. It's a commonplace of our civilization.

We're so overlaid and interleaved and underpinned with conventions, traditions, regulations, that what you see is usually only a pale echo of the real person. We wear masks for each other's benefit. Sometimes they're uglier than our real selves, sometimes more beautiful, but neither does much harm to anybody—except to the wearer.

What harm does it do? Well, it creates, sooner or later, a false sense of values.

We begin to see ourselves in a distorting mirror—or, if you like, to see our masks in a plain mirror—

and try to live up to them. And we become so taken up with that that we haven't any time to devote to our real selves. After a while we lose sight of our real selves altogether—and that's a bad thing.

Bad in this way—that we have a definite job of work to do, which can only be done by ourselves, the essential Us; and the more we do it the more we become Ourselves.

It makes you dizzy to try to think of the millions of years it's taken for You and Me to be born; hundreds of thousands of years of invisible jelly-like things in the cooler parts of the almost boiling water as the earth cooled off; hundreds of thousands of years of unpleasant-looking, squelchy things spraddling over the surface of the liquid mud; hundreds of thousands of years of ranging through forests and plains and swamps with fierce spines growing along our backs and foul murder in our hearts.

A long job.

And now that we've got as far as we have (though taking a long view of Eternity it doesn't seem so far, in spite of our neon lights and chromium-plating and foam-baths) all we seem to be able to do with our new-found personalities is to try to swap them over for somebody else's. It does seem a waste of all these millions of years!

Certainly an actress is at a disadvantage in this respect—that part of her job is to assume different personalities; and also the convention of the theatre demands that she put up a certain outward appear-

ance which has no other purpose, as far as I can discover, than to put up a certain outward appearance. It's just so much hooey, but we all do it.

I want to become sufficiently Myself—that is to say, I want Florence Desmond to become sufficient of a Person, if not actually a Personality—to be able to remain definitely (and even aggressively) Myself, even in the purlieus of the theatre.

It's comparatively easy when you're away from the theatre—if your tastes lie in that direction. You can relax and get out of the gewgaws and the kickshawses and kick (Shakespeare called them that; I'm not sure how you put them on, but I'm sure I'd be glad to get them off).

I've always been a person of simple tastes. I like to get down to my country cottage and wear tweeds and thick soles and tramp about . . . and my favourite dish is steak-and-kidney pudding. I'm most thoroughly happy when I'm most natural.

Possibly as a kind of subconscious outlet from this, I found myself, years ago, able to mimic people.

And now comes the near-tragedy.

The more I mimicked, the better I became at it, and the better I became the more I had to do it.

You may argue that this is only acting, and part of an actress's ordinary job. But there's a subtle difference.

In playing an ordinary character part—such as, for instance, Florrie Small in *The Likes of Her*, which was my first film rôle—you contribute *something* to

the effect—something of yourself, of your own knowledge of life and of people, your own personality. The character may be utterly foreign to your own—as I hope Florrie Small was to Florrie Desmond—but all the same there are gaps in the author's description and the producer's conception of the part that you simply *have* to fill in from somewhere—and you fill them in with bits of your own brain, if any.

That, at any rate, is what *I* understand by acting; and in films it's even more important to have something to contribute, because no one seems to have a very clear conception of the part—except perhaps the original author of the story, and he's always either left out on the sidewalk or else browbeaten into submission.

A mimic has no gaps to fill in. The part is there, defined, inescapable; and the better the mimic, the truer this is.

Mimicry requires two gifts—observation and imitation, and the latter depends on the former. If I am to give a good imitation of, say, Greta Garbo, I must observe her so closely that there are practically no gaps left in my mental image of her. Then I must make my voice, and my eyes, and my limbs relay that conception to my audience.

In the case of a character part, and still more of a "straight" part, watch two different people playing it—at different times, of course, to avoid getting a squint—and you'll find that, although in both cases

it conforms to the author's description and the character as conveyed in the dialogue, action, and plot, there are two distinct people; and the more imaginative and "finished" the players are, the greater the difference between them will be; whereas the better two mimics are, the more *alike* their performances will be—because they will both be like the subject.

It's simply the difference between freehand drawing and following out a set pattern; and most of us know which we'd rather do.

That's why I want to get away from mimicry; because I believe I've got something to contribute to a rôle; because I want to be myself just a little, even in a part that's foreign to my nature.

Every actress who cares tuppence about her job would surely rather "create" a part in the West End than slavishly imitate the West End performance for the Provinces—quite apart, I mean, from the honour and glory and . . . salary. There's more satisfaction in it. It's one of the incidental rewards of stardom.

I suppose I ought to be grateful to my impersonations, for they have certainly been the means of my becoming a star; but, while they've been carrying me upwards, they've also clung to me like limpets—ten-ton limpets.

I went to Hollywood branded as an impersonator. The only film I played in (*Mr. Snitch*—no, you didn't see it, I hope) presented me as an English girl on her way to Hollywood, giving imitations of

the Hollywood stars. Nobody there could see me as anything but Greta Garbo, or Mae West, or Zasu Pitts. They looked right through Florence Desmond without seeing her. I was practically transparent.

Only one person in all that queer city could see any possibilities in me as a straight actress. That was Jesse Lasky.

"Florence," he said earnestly, "I'll find something for you to do, never fear. And when I do I'll call you up."

He was exactly as good as his word. One evening the telephone rang, and it was Jesse Lasky on the wire. My heart pounded. Here was my chance at last—the chance I had come six thousand miles for.

"Oh, Florence, darling, we've just finished a film called *I am Suzanne*, featuring Lilian Harvey, and in it we've gotten a puppet show, with puppets dressed like Garbo, Dietrich, and other stars. Now I want to know will you come right over and supply the voices for the sound-track . . ."

I wept.

It wasn't until I returned to the country from which my impersonations had rescued me that I was given a chance (by C. B. Cochran) to drop them.

And not a moment too soon. The public is an inveterate pigeon-holer; and if in one or two more plays and films I'd done my "Hollywood Party," it would have shoved me so far into the pigeon-hole marked "Impersonator" that I would never have got out.

It's good to be free from that. I started my career as an actress, not a trier-on of other people's personalities, however amusing and profitable such an occupation may be; and please Heaven I'll finish as an actress.

To conceal the greater part of myself in the rôle when I'm on the stage; to drop the rôle off my shoulders and be absolutely myself when I'm off the stage; there are my two main ambitions.

Wish me luck with them!

# *I want to be African*

by

PAUL ROBESON

[AM a Negro. The origin of the Negro is African. It would therefore seem an easy matter for me to assume African nationality.

Instead it is an extremely complicated matter, fraught with the gravest importance to me and some millions of coloured folk.

Africa is a Dark Continent not merely because its people are dark-skinned or by reason of its extreme impenetrability, but because its history is lost. We have an amazingly vivid reconstruction of the culture of ancient Egypt, but the roots of almost the whole remainder of Africa are buried in antiquity.

They are, however, rediscoverable; and they will in time be rediscovered.

I am confirmed in this faith by recent researches linking the *culture* of the Negro with that of many peoples of the East.

Let us consider for a moment the problem of my people—the African Negroes in the Occident, and particularly in America.

We are now fourteen millions strong—though

perhaps "strong" is not the apt word; for nearly two and a half centuries we were in chains, and although to-day we are technically free and officially labelled "American Citizen," we are at a great economic disadvantage, most trades and many professions being practically barred to us and social barriers inexorably raised.

Consequently the American Negro in general suffers from an acute inferiority complex; it has been drummed into him that the white man is the Salt of the Earth and the Lord of Creation, and as a perfectly natural result his ambition is to become as nearly like a white man as possible.

He is that tragic creature, a man without a nationality. He claims to be American, to be British, to be French—but you cannot assume a nationality as you would a new suit of clothes.

In the country of his adoption, or the country that ruthlessly adopted his forbears, he is an alien; but (herein lies his tragedy) he believes himself to have broken away from his true origins; he has, he argues, nothing whatever in common with the inhabitant of Africa to-day—and that is where I believe he is wrong.

It may be asked "Why disturb him if he is happy in his present state?"

There are two sufficient answers to that; one that he is *not* happy, except in so far as his natural gaiety of disposition overcomes his circumstances—and the fact that a sick man laughs is surely no reason for



*“If I got 99 marks, why didn’t I get 100?”*



not attempting to cure his sickness; and the other is that there is a world-necessity above and beyond his immediate needs.

This world-necessity is for an understanding between the nations and peoples which will lead ultimately to the "family of nations" ideal.

To this world-community every nation will contribute whatever it has of culture; and unless the African Negro (including his far-flung collaterals) bestirs himself and comes to a realization of his potentialities and obligations there will be no culture for him to contribute.

At present the younger generation of Negroes in America looks towards Africa and asks "What is there *there* to interest me? What of value has Africa to offer that the Western world cannot give me?"

At first glance the question seems unanswerable. He sees only the savagery, devil-worship, witch-doctors, voo-doo, ignorance, squalor, and darkness taught in American schools.

Where these exist, he is looking at the broken remnants of what was in its day a mighty thing; something which perhaps has not been destroyed, but only driven underground, leaving ugly scars upon the earth's surface to mark the place of its ultimate reappearance.

We know that in China there was a great and mighty culture—mighty in the sense not of pomp but of potency. An exiled Chinese to-day, at University in Manchester or Birmingham, might look

towards China and ask the self-same question—"What has that chaos of conflicting misgovernments and household gods and superstitions to offer me?"—but we know enough of history to be aware that great cultures do not completely die, but are soil for future growths.

That portion of China that is only Buddhist is negligible, the publicized part, the unscratched surface; below are the vast depths of spirituality of which Taoism in its present-day form is the broken relic.

Somewhere, sometime—perhaps at the Renaissance, but I think much earlier—a great part of Religion went astray. A blind groping after Rationality resulted in an incalculable loss in pure Spirituality. Mankind placed a sudden dependence on that part of his mind that was brain, intellect, to the discountenance of that part that was sheer evolved instinct and intuition; we grasped at the shadow and lost the substance . . . and now we are not even altogether clear what the substance was.

Now the pendulum is swinging back. Preaching in London not long ago, Father Bede Frost is reported to have said:

The epoch that began at the end of the sixteenth century is now ending. You can see the tiles fall from the roof, the walls beginning to crack. . . .

During that epoch men's minds have been influenced by three dogmas:

The perfectability of man in himself,  
The inevitability of progress towards a golden age,  
The infallibility of physical science.

Mankind is gradually feeling its way back to a more fundamental, more primitive, but perhaps truer religion; and religion, the orientation of man to God or forces greater than himself, must be the basis of all culture.

This religion, this basic culture, has its roots in the Far East, *and in Africa*.

What links the American Negro to this culture? It would take a psycho-anthropologist to give it a name; but its nature is obvious to any earnest inquirer.

Its manifestation occurs in his forms of religion and of art. It has recently been demonstrated beyond a possibility of doubt that the dances, the songs, and the worship perpetuated by the Negro in America are identical with those of his cousins hundreds of years removed in the depths of Africa, whom he has never seen, of whose very existence he is only dimly aware.

His peculiar sense of rhythm alone would stamp him indelibly as African; and a slight variation of this same rhythm-consciousness is to be found among the Tartars and Chinese, to whom he is much more nearly akin than he is to the Arab, for example.

Not long ago I learned to speak Russian, since, the Russians being so closely allied through the Tartars to the Chinese, I expected to find myself

more in sympathy with that language than with English, French, or German. I was not disappointed; I found that there were Negro concepts which I could express much more readily in Russian than in other languages.

I would rather sing Russian folk-songs than German grand opera—not because it is necessarily better music, but because it is more *instinctive* and less *reasoned* music. It is in my blood.

The pressing need of the American Negro is an ability to set his own standards. At school, at university, at law school, it didn't matter to me whether white students passed me or I passed them. What mattered was, if I got 85 marks, *why didn't I get 100?* If I got 99, *why didn't I get 100?* "To thine own self be true" is a sentiment sneered at to-day as merely Victorian—but upon its observance may well depend the future of nations and peoples.

It is of course useful and even necessary from an economic and social standpoint for the Negro to *understand* Western ideas and culture, for he will gain nothing by further isolating himself; and I would emphasize that his mere physical return to his place of origin is not the essential condition of his regeneration. In illustration of this take the parallel case of the Jews.

They, like a vast proportion of Negroes, are a race without a nation; but, far from Palestine, they are indissolubly bound by their ancient religious practices—which they recognize as such. I emphasize this in

contradistinction to the religious practices of the American Negro, which, from the snake-worship practised in the deep South to the Christianity of the revival meeting, are patently survivals of the earliest African religions; *and he does not recognize them as such.*

Their acknowledgment of their common origin, species, interest, and attitudes binds Jew to Jew; a similar acknowledgment will bind Negro and Negro.

I realize that this will never be accomplished by viewing from afar the dark rites of the witch-doctor—a phenomenon as far divorced from fundamental reality as are the petty bickerings over altar decorations and details of vestment from the intention of Christ.

It may be accomplished, or at least furthered, by patient inquiry. To this end I am learning Swahili, Tivi, and other African dialects—which come easily to me *because their rhythm is the same as that employed by the American Negro in speaking English*; and when the time is ripe I propose to investigate, on the spot, the possibilities of such a regeneration as I have outlined.

Meanwhile in my music, my plays, my films I want to carry always this central idea: to be African.

Multitudes of men have died for less worthy ideals; it is even more eminently worth living for.

# *I want romance*

by

MERLE OBERON

I AM (I hope!) at the beginning of my career.

I expect that career to be, more or less, my life; so what I want from my career and what I want from Life must be, to that extent, identical.

What attracts us as audiences to the theatre or to films? Isn't it glamour? And what's glamour but another word for romance?

But supposing you were asked what *is* romance? I've been so afraid somebody would catch me off my guard with that question that I've taken the trouble to inquire.

As I understand it, the romance we know to-day began at the Renaissance, in or about the fifteenth century, when a great wave of imagination, glamorous imagination, swept through the Latin countries of Southern Europe.

It was based, as far as I can discover, on three main conditions. First, the prevailing stab-and-slink-away method of settling differences of opinion, which imparted to life a piquant flavour of uncertainty. Second, the cloistered condition of women, which

made relationship between the sexes a matter of clandestine meetings, of secret understandings, of perilous approaches. Third, the great revival of Art, which lent an atmosphere of beauty and graciousness and spaciousness to everyday life.

The two great kinds of artists of those days were the painter and the troubadour. The former included such masters as Mantegna, Titian, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Holbein, and Dürer, whose work we have to-day; the names of the troubadours have mostly faded into silence with their songs, but they played a great part in fostering this new cult and spreading it northward through Europe, into phlegmatic Germany, barbaric Russia, and across our own bleak shores.

France blazed up at it like a kindled torch. It stumbled and checked on the flat, windswept Netherlands, and petered out among the fjords and peaks of Scandinavia.

And it was revived in England in the nineteenth century by Scott, Byron, Shelley, and Keats—presumably as a reaction from Good Prince Albert's ornamental iron gas-brackets and stove-pipe trousers.

So far, I've been cribbing. Now we can put away the encyclopaedia and try to decide just *what* this thing is.

It seems to me to boil down into a question of imagination. Almost as long as there have been men there have been stories, and story-tellers. The Stone Age man who carved reindeer and mammoths and sabre-tooth tigers on the walls of the cave for other

members of the tribe to admire started a train of thought in the minds of his fellows. So did the warrior who came back from a hunting expedition, with tales of enormous animals he had met and conquered (and to prove it he brought back a toe-bone as big as his thigh).

So did the minstrel who made songs, not of his own achievements, but about the ancient heroes.

They all whetted their hearer's imagination, so that he pictured himself doing equally heroic deeds in similar circumstances.

Now (this is the encyclopaedia speaking again) a change has come over the face of Romance. It appears that the ancient epic or chronicle (of which Homer's *Odyssey*, which I don't suppose any of us has ever read, is the great classic example) was based on the idea that man was merely the plaything of the gods; a pretty grim thought when one considers what a collection of nitwits, sots, and satyrs the pagan gods seem to have been.

Then along came Christianity, to say that man could do something about his own life and destiny; and adventure suddenly assumed a point, an importance, that it had lacked. Instead of being merely for self-defence or self-aggrandisement, every effort a man made now *meant* something. His struggles were no longer just an after-dinner joke for a pack of drunken gods.

There, of course, is the value of Romance . . . adventure with a purpose.



*"Now we come to Me"*



Let's see what it does. (No, this isn't the encyclopaedia now. This is sheer Merle.)

First, it interests.

If the poet who wrote

*Of all sad words of tongue or pen  
The saddest are these—"It might have been"*

had been a little less concerned with making atrocious rhymes, he might have said "Of all intriguing words man can utter, the most intriguing are these—"It may be." "

Possibility! Adventure! Romance! Whose pulse fails to quicken at the words?—especially that vast majority whose circumstances simply don't allow of their riding forth themselves in search of adventure, either on a super-charger or in a supercharged super-sports.

If they did that, they'd probably be sacked for being absent from work and arrested for being in possession of a stolen war-horse.

But they can adventure vicariously. Through the story-teller's art they can enjoy in perfect safety and comfort adventures that would certainly involve them in danger and discomfort.

Now as to *how*.

The story-teller's medium may be music, or painting, or books, or plays, or sculpture, or *films*.

I'm particularly impressed to find (no, not encyclopaedia this time; dictionary) that the very word Romance derives from the Old French *romanz*,

which in turn comes from the Latin *romanice*, meaning "in the vulgar tongue."

I love that expression. It's rich and matey and communal. The Prayer Book uses it to describe our Bible.

Certainly films have been called vulgar often enough. And it's perfectly true, in the same sense in which Romance and the Bible are vulgar—the sense of belonging to the people.

Films—owing largely to the foresight and shrewdness of certain American business men who have been roundly damned ever since for their lack of artistic sensibility—are a heritage of the people.

You have to be rich to afford grand opera, or paintings, or sculpture, except in art galleries as bleak as Tibet and as cold as charity. To afford films you only have to have ninepence. They are almost as cheap as that marvellous free show, the poster-hoarding. They are everybody's luxury.

And I really believe they are millions of people's necessity, too. There's something inside us which makes us quest—some wheel in our curious clockwork that makes us want to go outside our daily round for our excitement.

Mind you, I don't think this quest should be carried to excess, any more than drinking or smoking or gambling should. Half the satisfaction of life lies in being satisfied with your own job, and not having to go outside it for *all* your entertainment.

Still, modern life is so constricted and pigeon-holed that most people want *some* escape into imagination; and that imagination is best fed with books, or plays, or films.

What does it *do* to you? Any harm? I think not. We who have a job to do are grown up. We are not likely to let our imaginations run away with us. We keep them well in hand, ride them on the curb, and dismount at the end of the ride feeling all the better for the exercise.

There's another use for romance, though, besides providing a let-up.

Why are you reading this book? Why am I going to read the other chapters the very minute it's published? Not just as a ten-minutes' rest from grouse-shooting or dish-washing, but because we're interested in people. And this isn't just idle curiosity. We like to look over into other people's minds, just as we look over into their back-gardens, partly to admire, but also partly to see what they do to their shrubs and flowers and grass to make them come up like that—or perhaps to determine why they're not growing at all, so that we can avoid making the same mistakes.

In either case, it helps a great deal; and films can serve the same useful purpose. I don't believe the millions of people who go to the cinema every week are there merely to kill time, or to shelter from the rain, or from force of habit. I think they want (perhaps subconsciously) some experience of other

people's lives and adventures in order to apply the same principles to their own lives and adventures.

And they get it best, easiest, and cheapest from books and films.

Now we come to Me.

I want to have a hand in all this, partly because I think it's worth doing, partly because the doing of it is adventure, romance, in itself.

Consider the possibilities of a film like *The Private Life of Don Juan* or *The Scarlet Pimpernel*—the channels they provide for imagination. Channels? Lightning conductors! They're the magic carpet that whirls us away to other times and other climes, and brings us back feeling fit to tackle anything from a sink to a summons.

And now I've likened films to horses and cars and channels and lightning conductors and carpets and back-gardens, all in a few sentences, so there should be something to please everybody.

I'm fairly patriotic. I don't chant the praises of "every age but this and every country but my own"; but I do think it's valuable to know how other people live and react and how they used to live and react, so that we can apply the knowledge to our own cases when the time comes.

When it *does* come, of course, our own romance is the greatest that ever happened to anyone. Meanwhile, books and films will do!

# *I want to burn my powder-puff*

by

LESLIE HOWARD

HAVING recently been playing in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, I can imagine a patch of Regency dialogue here. Thus:—

MYSELF: I want to burn my powder-puff.

THE READER: Then damme, sir, why not burn it and ha' done?

MYSELF: Faith, sir, so I will, stap me!

THE READER: And when, sir, may we expect this —this conflagration?

MYSELF: Zounds, sir, the very moment I can afford it.

Good dramatic dialogue or not, it at least has the virtue of being true.

I do *not* want to be an actor.

You may protest that it's a little late to think of that now; but fortunately I don't agree with you. It's never too late to mend your ways.

One becomes an actor in youth or early manhood because of the glamour of the footlights, or because it's fun to dress up, or because one imagines one has

the artistic temperament, or because one dislikes the idea of being a bank-clerk, or . . . something. There are always plenty of excuses.

And then one finds that one is committed to the profession of acting, being now too old to start in any of the more humdrum careers; and the glamour has worn off, leaving a very stodgy brown ginger-bread exposed under the gilt; and it's no longer fun to assume a different fancy dress several times in an evening, but an intolerable bore; and the artistic temperament that chafed at having to be on an office stool at 8.45 every morning chafes at having to be on a stage by 8.45 every night.

Nevertheless, one continues to be an actor, for one of two reasons. If one is successful, all one's instincts are naturally against killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. If one is unsuccessful . . . the average man's pride will not let him give in. He, too, keeps on.

I don't mean to suggest that most actors feel that way. It may thrill them to death to work in the theatre or the studio; they may actually enjoy acting.

I don't.

I feel, whenever I appear in public, that I am making an exhibition of myself; not necessarily an absurd exhibition, or a disgraceful exhibition, but simply that I am exhibiting moods and emotions that I would much rather keep to myself.

A psycho-analyst would say that I was suffering from Heaven-knows-what-long-named complex. He is probably right; but I see no prospect of getting

it dug out of my system, and I also see no particular advantage in digging it out. While I have it, I can't enjoy being an actor; but as I don't propose to remain an actor a minute longer than is economically necessary, let it remain.

It may be argued, and with justice, that unless actors and actresses are willing to indulge in the necessary exhibitionism we shall be deprived of a very useful mirror of mankind. Very well! There will always be those who enjoy acting, or profess to. For my part I shall do my best to hold up the mirror in a different way—a way in which I feel I can do it more usefully and a great deal more enjoyably; to wit, by writing.

I much prefer to write; plays, articles, short stories—I've already achieved an encouraging measure of success in this direction, particularly in the United States.

To present emotions on the stage you must, to some extent, *assume* those emotions; I don't see how otherwise one can be convincing about them; and personally I don't regard the display of emotion in a man to be fitting or desirable. A man should be self-controlled. He should be what the psychologists call introvert, a woman extrovert.

That is why the profession of acting suits women. It supplies them with a highly necessary outlet for emotion. Also, the assuming of fine feathers and make-up comes natural to them; it's part of their ordinary life. I could never get over my distaste for

seeing a man use a lipstick, even for the stage. For women it has been only one step (a war-time step) from making-up in private to making-up in public. It might take only another war to induce the actor to carry his cosmetics about in his pocket and make-up between courses at table, as he now does between acts of a play.

Can there be any more embarrassing sight than an old man—even an old actor—with a powder-puff in his hand? That's why I want to burn mine. Acting, as a serious business of life, seems to me to grow progressively more unsuitable to a man as he grows older; I only hope I shall be able to abandon the whole business before many years—before, in fact, I have reached an age at which I shall look into my dressing-room mirror and see an old man wielding a powder-puff.

By no means do I wish to sever my connection with the theatre. In all my plays—in which I have been associated with Mr. Gilbert Miller—every part of the business of casting, presenting, producing, and managing a play has interested me intensely; and, as I have said, the writing part is one that I feel myself to be fitted for. Plays are probably none the worse for being written out of one's experiences as an actor; and for that reason I am glad to have had that experience.

In fact, the more experiences a playwright has had, the better, for, metaphorically speaking, he must to a certain extent display his own quivering

viscera for the public edification and entertainment. Only he does it in a certain decent privacy, and the result is, as it were, reflected for public review. This appears to me a more seemly manner of conducting a vivisection.

So much for the theatre; one can at least feel, about stage acting, that it has the sanction of tradition and a prospect of continuance.

With the films it's different.

The disadvantages of acting are no less marked in the studio than in the theatre; indeed, they are rather more so, for the stage actor has at least a certain amount of illusion to assist him in warming-up to a pitch of emotion; and there is also the audience, which by its interest provides the actor with a kind of stimulus.

In the film studio these adventitious aids are missing. There is no audience except an assembly of directors, assistants, script-girls, camera-men, electricians, carpenters, make-up men, dressers, hair-dressers, and firemen, most of whom are waiting impatiently for the director to say "That's all for to-day, boys." All the stimulus you get from them doesn't amount to a row of beans.

And, if one grows self-conscious in the theatre, where one is aware of an unseen audience concentrating on the part rather than on oneself, how much more so must one become in the cold-blooded process of film production, where one suffers from a plainly visible audience which, no whit deceived by paint

or costume, is watching the actor and not the rôle, and subconsciously attributing any kind of mountebankery on the actor's part to an exhibition of his own over-ripe personality.

That is my quarrel with the star-system, which is killing the actor-system. The public is encouraged to follow an actor from play to play and from picture to picture on the implied guarantee that the personality they enjoyed once will be repeated *ad lib*. All the star's publicity is built about his or her private life, and the whole issue resolves itself into a contest of off-stage personalities.

Once upon a time theatrical managers who had built up a name for providing first-rate entertainment for their patrons were trusted by the play-going public to choose the right cast for the play; now, owing to the personal ballyhoo prevalent to-day, the public insists on seeing a certain player, irrespective of whether he fits the part or not.

This evil is even more marked in the film world. The star is of more importance than either the rôle or the story; the part, in fact, is greater than the whole—which, as our old schoolmate Euclid used to observe, is absurd.

But I will go a step further and declare that acting, as understood in the Theatre, has no rightful place in film production. The chief problem of the actor in the theatre is to *sustain* a character; film scenes can be so short that the veriest savage, or tyro, or child can "do his stuff" for that length of

time. The truth of this is obvious from the fact that the most convincing films are those featuring South Sea Islanders, or Aran Islanders, or Russian peasants, or other primitive people who are able to "be themselves" without self-consciousness.

If it were economically practicable, I would give up acting this afternoon. As it happens, I have made a certain success, and that has established circumstances which are more or less binding; in other words, I have obligations to my dependents, whom I have led to expect a certain measure of comfort.

But as soon as the celluloid goose has laid enough golden eggs, I assure you I shall burn that powder-puff of mine with the greatest pleasure!

# *I want to be two people*

by

JESSIE MATTHEWS

WHEN we step into the show-business we are stepping out from behind a curtain into the full light of the public eye; and it's grand!

We bask in it. We revel in it. We have arrived—we are Somebody—we are noticed; and whether the light be harsh or kindly, we accept it as our proper and true element, and a fitting tribute to our Art (capital A, please!).

Then, after a while, we begin to droop. The light becomes a powerful glare. We blink and wince (though the audience must not see us wincing) and long to be back behind that kindly curtain—just for a few moments . . . just for a little rest.

And, to our consternation, we find we can't. The thick, sheltering curtain has become the thinnest gauze; the light pierces it, follows us about, into our homes, into our most secret thoughts and hopes and fears, our wishes and complexes and inhibitions, where only the softest, kindest candlelight should be allowed to shine.

How appalling "private publicity" would seem in

other walks of life! Just imagine if Miss Jones of Camberwell, carrying off a scholarship at the Guildhall School of Music, or Mr. Smith of Hammersmith, winning the Hammersmith Middleweight Darts Championship, were expected to expose their private lives for the inspection of all and sundry—even having to produce a “love-life” in order to be *really* news! One’s imagination boggles at the idea.

Yet, take it from me, it’s no easier for us. We chafe and fret just as much as they would under the “bright white light” that beats upon us.

We should like—and some of us even manage to secure—a little private life. Just a little. Say a weekend to ourselves, occasionally, or an odd hour or two in the evening. It doesn’t seem much to ask—but it is terribly difficult to obtain.

With most of us who really care about our job and have been through the mill of small parts and touring, work comes first, definitely. There’s a tremendous satisfaction in being Jessie Matthews, the star—in seeing my name in neon lights—pleasing audiences—knowing that I’m gradually growing more worthy of their applause. I get a great kick out of that.

But is it too much to ask that I may be also Mrs. Sonnie Hale? That I may keep these two personalities apart? That, in fact, I may be two distinct and separate people, one public and quite well known and the slave of audiences, and the other private and no better known than Miss Jones or

Mr. Smith and slave to nothing but my own inclinations?

"Private publicity"—was there ever a more contradictory phrase, or a more incongruous thing?

Let's consider how it began.

Three or four hundred years ago actors were officially "rogues and vagabonds," and nobody cared tuppence about their private lives. What they did "off" was considered to be beneath the notice of respectable people. An actor was, in fact, two individuals; the man in front of the backdrop whom everybody knew, and the man behind whom nobody knew.

Then came the actors with a claim to social standing—Garrick, Kean, Irving . . . and one day it occurred to somebody to wonder how far their dramatic talents were influenced by their private lives.

For instance, he probably saw Lady Macbeth helping to murder the King of Scotland, and said to himself "By Jove, she does do it naturally! Wonder if she's like that in private life!" and if he was sufficiently interested he'd take the trouble to find out.

Or if an actor had a phenomenal memory, the self-appointed investigator might say "I wonder if he always had a memory like that, even as a child!"

Well, the demand always creates a supply, so you can bet these details were produced and made much of; and that was the beginning of "private publicity."

Since then it has spread far out beyond its original principles. People are no longer interested in a star's private life from the point of view of how it affects her work; they're interested in it for its own sake—just as though it were a story they were reading in a magazine; only it usually isn't so well constructed.

Yet they wouldn't be interested in the private life of Mrs. Sonnie Hale unless she were Jessie Matthews as well. They insist on the two women being one; I want the one woman to be two.

One way in which this type of publicity can be a disadvantage is by pursuing you into your work.

Most of you, of course, have never had occasion to enter a film studio. If you had, you would understand better how difficult it is to concentrate on one's work "between takes."

Electricians rush about, carpenters hammer, prop-men prop, make-up men fiddle about with one's face, everyone is trying to get the next shot "lined up." You are hastily taking a last glance through your script, when someone whose painful duty it is comes and asks you something quite intimate and personal, and expects you to revert in a few seconds to your own personal self and to share the details about that self with him.

Supposing I were playing Susie in *The Good Companions*, no one would be likely to ask me about *The Man from Toronto* or *The Midshipmaid*. Yet they ask me questions about Mrs. Sonnie Hale, who is quite as different.

When I am on the set I try to *be* the character. To be reminded of some other self is to break the continuity and cause delay.

That's how "private publicity" interferes with working hours. I've already explained how it interferes with playtime—and there is so little playtime!

For instance, when I was playing in *Waltzes from Vienna* (all about sounds) my husband was in *Wild Boy* (all about hounds). He was at Islington, I at Shepherd's Bush.

Alfred Hitchcock, directing *Waltzes from Vienna*, was very anxious to keep within schedule, so we worked far into the night, and sometimes I returned home in the small hours—almost with the milk!

The *Wild Boy* unit, on the other hand, had to start at an unearthly hour to reach location at Northaw, near Potter's Bar; and one morning I was just going to bed when Sonnie Hale was getting up—somewhere between four and five a.m.

"Good-night!" I said sleepily.

"Good-morning!" he said briskly. And that was all we saw of each other for twenty-four hours.

That glimpse into the Private Life of Mr. and Mrs. Hale may give you an idea of how little of that private life there really is.

Here is another point; we all hope for genius, but we can all *command* efficiency; and to be efficient in our work we must to some extent balance it with our recreation. The clerk who toils in obscurity should have an occasional burst of glory, a brief



*"There is so little playtime"*



place in the sun. We who toil in the limelight should have our moments of respite in the shade, if we are to keep up to the standard of health, vigour, enthusiasm, and freshness which audiences expect and to which they are entitled.

Besides, there is that precious quality called *detachment* to be preserved—and it is worth preserving. The best workman is one who can put down a completed job, look at it from every angle, and pass critical judgment on it.

“M’m . . . !” he says, eyes screwed up, lips pursed, brow knitted. “M’m, yes . . . Not bad . . . but there might have been improvement *here*. *This* curve should have been fuller, *that* line longer, the proportion *here* more harmonious. . . . Well, the job’s done—but the next one will be better.”

It’s a priceless boon to a craftsman—that gift of self-criticism. He develops it, fosters it, depends largely upon it for guidance and inspiration; and the actor and actress must do the same.

It is one of the pursuits of Mrs. Sonnie Hale to criticize Jessie Matthews on the screen. She is not always a kind critic; but she tries hard to be a just one—and a constructive one.

For this purpose she goes to little country picture-halls and to the big cinemas in provincial cities and studies audience reaction—not only to her own screen self but to other players. I (Mrs. Hale speaking!) often notice that the bits of Jessie Matthews that audiences like best are not always the

bits that she herself has most enjoyed in the studio; and I draw her attention to it, sharply.

And *I* (this is Jessie now!), although I may be a little piqued, pull myself together and remind myself that audience reaction is the main object of my life and work, and try to profit by the advice.

Obviously we two women can't carry on this team-work if we are indissolubly one.

I don't mean to suggest for a moment that publicity is not desirable. It's the trumpet that draws attention to our entrance to the arena, the orchestra that accompanies us all through our turn, the "soft music over battlefield" that makes our exit poignant and pointed.

But it should be publicity connected with our work, our career, our public life. As the curtain falls or the film fades out, I should like the music and the lights to stop, silence and obscurity to fall like a kindly cloak about us.

I want to be two people. Am I crying for the moon?

# *I want to keep healthy*

by

LESLIE HENSON

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, who ought to have known better, wrote

*The world is so full of a number of things  
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings.*

He usually knew what he was talking about, did Robert (Mr. Stevenson to you, of course), but just this once he slipped up. In fact, he left out a factor that cooks the whole equation.

Admitting the “number of things,” and passing lightly over the obvious bloomer of assuming that kings are ever happy (my hat, what a job!), we find ourselves up against the question “Is a number of things enough?” Or, putting it shortly, “Is the mere existence of a multitude and diversity of interests sufficient in itself to ensure our happiness?”

Even more shortly, the answer is “No.”

According to Stevenson, there is one indispensable condition of happiness.

Interest.

And because I like these one-word lines, let's put

down the indispensable condition of interest the same way.

Health.

Therefore, health is necessary to happiness. And I'll prove it to you.

We all want to be happy; even the people who are only happy when they're miserable want to be miserable so that they can be happy. You grant that?

Very well, then. It doesn't matter how many things there are in the world—sunsets, golf-clubs, starlight, Lobster Newburg, spring mattresses, apple-blossom, winners, needle-baths, sculpture, Cup-ties—they won't contribute a particle to our happiness unless we're interested in them. And we can't be interested in them unless blood of the right chemical content is being pumped from our heart to our brain.

As Bernard Shaw would certainly have said if he'd thought of it first, this matter of heart is the heart of the matter.

Are you musical? If so, what's the finest performance of the finest symphony orchestra to you if you're doubled up with tummy-ache? Less than the dust.

You enjoy a good play? So do I—if I'm feeling fit; but, as a counter-interest, an aching tooth is more than a match for any play on earth.

You enjoy getting your teeth into a job of work—a job that you know to be just a little beyond your ordinary powers, but that you can tackle if you put every ounce into it?

Yes, so do I. I see we've got a lot in common.

But there's one thing certain under this wide and starry sky, and that is that if you've got indigestion you won't be *able* to put every ounce into a job. You probably won't even want to.

Some of us put the enjoyment of our friends' society above any other kind of relaxation. But try to enjoy it when you've got a touch of liver! My word! It's putting too great a strain on you, and on them, and on friendship itself.

You can't think of any kind of human pleasure that isn't dependent on our being in the right frame of mind for it; and you can't think of any frame of mind that isn't at least partially dependent on a decent state of health.

Most of us think it would be grand to be millionaires. What a break! What a time we could have! What fun it'd be, treating all our friends!

If Stevenson had said "We should all be as happy as millionaires" he'd have been on safer ground. Look at millionaires! Are they happy? Look at the daddy of them all, poor old John D. Rockefeller himself, with his duralumin artificial tum-tum and his banqueting-table groaning under a glass of milk and a pepsin tablet.

The late Baroness Burdett-Coutts was one of the richest women in Europe and envied by all because she could have everything she wanted . . . except relief from a mysterious malady that allowed her no absolute rest by night or day, poor lady.

A quarter of a century ago—of course, I can't

remember it myself, but I dare say some of you older ones may—when Father Bernard Vaughan was preaching in London against the Smart Set, he exclaimed from the pulpit “My friends, the road to perdition is paved with roses, and diamond rings, and sables, and motor-cars!”—whereat a small feminine voice at the back of the church piped up “O Death, where is thy sting?”

Well, some of us *might* be willing to die for luxury—but would we be willing to live dyspeptically for it?

Mind you, I think people can go to the other extreme and worry themselves ill over their health. Every week they’ve got hold of some brand-new theory that’s going to put them on the top of their form; and they insist on shoving it down your throat whether you need it or not.

They remind me of the American epitaph to a jay-walker:—

*Here lies the body of Jonathan Jay  
Who died defending his right of way.  
He was right, dead right, as he walked along,  
But he’s just as dead as if he was wrong.*

The inveterate self-doctor may be dead right, but . . .

Anyway, I don’t believe physicking is necessary except in extreme cases. Most of us start with every advantage in the way of health, and if we only carry on on the same lines we can keep fit without filling

ourselves up with pot. carb. mist. sulph., or coloured water at three-and-six a bottle.

It'd do the people who worry themselves puce over their health a lot of good to take a brisk walk through Limehouse or Stepney now and again and have a look at the kids in the gutter. They're dirty, they're ragged, you probably wouldn't want to pick 'em up and nurse 'em—but fit! Whew! You couldn't kill 'em with a meat-axe.

They started with decent digestions, as most of us do; but they never insulted those digestions by flinging all kinds of indigestible rubbish into them. They had to be limited to nourishing food, because Ma couldn't afford anything else. And they had to chew it well, because the supply was strictly limited and it goes farther that way.

And look at them now! Alert, fit, interested in everything and everybody! You never find a slum child bored. Fit people are never bored. Their brain reacts normally to every circumstance. They don't have to be artificially stimulated by cocktails or shocks.

They may become too *tired* to react, of course; but that's a natural process, quite different from boredom. Animals in their natural state are never bored; only in captivity. And when people are bored you know they're in captivity too—held captive by something in their insides that isn't functioning properly.

As for your work, it too depends on your works.

Mencken in *Prejudices* attributes genius to proper internal functioning. In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that the divine afflatus can be induced by investing in a barrel of Russian oil.

That may be slightly overstating the case for oil; but he's on the right track.

If this matter of health is important to people whose lives are governed by routine, you can imagine how essential it is for an actor.

We lead rackety lives—not in the sense of dissipation, but in our work. The theatre, though it does follow a certain routine, is bad enough. But when you come to films . . . !

There's no rhyme or reason about film production. You arrive at the studio at the preordained moment, and you may plunge straight into work or you may hang about for four or five hours wondering what's holding up the shooting-match; and when you *do* start, you may work right through two mealtimes without a break for a bun.

In the winter it's particularly trying, because you go from a stifling-hot sound-stage to an arctic corridor and risk pneumonia every time.

Only a person with a cast-iron constitution can stand it; and you can develop such a constitution by reasonable care and exercise.

Have you ever wondered what makes comedians so lugubrious off-stage? It's because they haven't taken reasonable care and exercise. Wrong meals at the wrong time, tinned-tongue-and-tannin in



*"As for your work, it depends on your works"*



theatrical lodgings, gin and wheelks when it should have been stout and chops—no wonder they've got "wicked stomachs," as Priestley says.

The Editor warned me when I chose my subject that I'd be swamped by invitations from manufacturers of patent medicines to say that I owed my success to a regular course of Poltwattle's Purifying Pepsin Powders or Aunt Aggie's Anti-Anaemia Admixture.

I'm sorry to disappoint Poltwattle and Auntie, but I owe my success (it's all right, I'm touching wood) to golf, and eating what I like and digesting it, and not worrying about what can't be helped.

And my world is so full of a number of things that I'm generally a good deal happier than kings.

A judicious mixture of eating, sleeping, and golf, nibble and niblick, bunk and bunker—and I'm ready for anything Life cares to send me.

# *I want everything*

by

TALLULAH BANKHEAD

**H**OW do we know what we want, anyway? If you point a gun at my head and say "Wha'd ya want?—Quick!" I'll say something, just to stall you off long enough to get cramp in your trigger-finger. But it won't be the truth, because I don't know what I want.

Nobody knows—or if they do, they don't know for long. I mean, you don't want the same thing long enough for it to be **What You Want From Life** in capital letters.

Well, maybe some people do. Maybe there's a few simple folks—or maybe a few million, I don't know—who fix their hearts, and their minds, and their everlasting souls on a thing, and keep on all their lives hoping for it. Living for it. Wanting It From Life.

But these are the people who never get it. They've fixed their hopes on something impossible—hitched their wagon to a star, and the traces have broken.

That's why I call them simple. They've got single-track minds, and there's no room for compromise. Most of us are too complex for that. We want too



*"Energy keeps us everlastingly chasing ourselves upstairs"*



many different things, and we want 'em quick and all together, so we have to do a little give-and-take to get even part of them.

The tragedy for the world's great wanters would happen if they got what they wanted. It would shatter their Great Illusion—which is that getting what you've set your heart on means happiness.

It *may*—for five seconds, or a week, or a year, according to the magnitude of the thing. But not permanently; you can't settle down and say "Well I've got that. Now I'm happy for the rest of my life."

Life—at any rate life as I've found it, and I've seen plenty— isn't like that. It wouldn't do you such dirt as to treat you like a cabbage. It treats you like a man or a woman, knocks you down and gives you a chance to bounce up again.

I want Life to go on doing that. Of course you get tired—oh, *God*, don't you get tired! But it's Life, and that's what I want Life to give me. Just . . . Life.

Of course we want things. We all do. We want to feel on top of the world, and we want to be great actresses, and we want it to be fine for the picnic, and we want to be Tallulah (or Phyllis, or Liz, or what have you) without let or hindrance, and we want a cigarette, and we want friends we can trust.

But for Heaven's sake don't imagine that that's *all*. That's the surest way to heart-break—or heart-ache, which is worse because it's not so dramatic or spectacular.

People whose main business in life seems to be debunking Tallulah (I'm sure they can't have time for anything else) will howl "Cynic!" But it isn't cynicism. The cynic says "Blessed is he who expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed." I say "Blessed is he who expecteth everything, for he can't *always* be disappointed."

I often get what I want. And one of the things I wanted was to see what the others had written in this book. And I got it.

It interests me enormously, not only because of what my fellow-contributors want but because of what they've already got.

Seems to me that's the very essence of the whole question—the relationship between what we want now and what we wanted . . . earlier in our careers.

Cedric Hardwicke, for instance, wants to give the theatrical profession a leg-up. If he hadn't done so much for it already he'd probably never have dared to admit that. That's one kind of wanting that grows with what it feeds on. The more he gets, in that respect, the more he'll want.

It's like a man climbing a mountain. He pants and sweats up the first slopes, and reaches the first peak in triumph—and then discovers to his dismay that there's another higher peak beyond, and a still higher one beyond that—and he can't see the very highest at all.

The happy man is the one who realizes how much lies ahead, and still wants to climb it, just for the

pleasure of climbing. Cedric Hardwicke is like that.

Then there are the people who are kept climbing by something inside them, but are simply dying to reach a point where they're justified in sitting down to rest, like Gracie Fields and Leslie Howard. Well, they're happy enough, too. There's an old Chinese proverb "To journey hopefully is better than to arrive." Arrival may be only the beginning of another climb in some other direction.

I sometimes think it would be better *not* to want at all. Just to go on living from day to day, taking things as they come.

But does happiness lie there? Or does it lie? Is a cabbage happy? If we stopped wanting, what would keep us going? Force of habit? The primeval will to live?

The only kind of person I can think of who *doesn't* want is a poor old broken drudge who has given up hope . . . and even she sometimes wants a drink.

Seymour Hicks wants naturalness. Well, he's already got more of it into his stage work than almost any other living actor. But in real life he wants to reach it slowly. Another Chinese proverb here—"Sof'lee, sof'lee, catchee monkey."

He might not admit it, but the reason he wants to "go sof'lee" is that he's afraid of arriving at absolute naturalness—and then finding the pendulum begin to swing back, as it always does.

There's just a chance that if we all ripped off our school ties and leaky patent-leather shoes and the rest of it and reverted to Nature we wouldn't be satisfied for long. We'd probably find it was Winter, or something. . . . There's such a thing as wanting the right thing at the wrong time.

For instance, the morning after a first-night party we may want a sleep more than anything else we can think of; and we have it—maybe sleep all afternoon, until time for the evening show.

And then that night we lie awake and curse because we didn't wait until sleeping-time.

I agree with Charles Bickford that finding-out is fun. That's the kind of wanting I can understand and sympathize with—provided you don't expect the finding-out to be the real prize. It's the *trying* to find out. The race, not the winning. The battle, not the victory.

Maybe (now that I've had a chance to think about it, and the gun isn't pointing at my head) what I should really be wanting is *the zest to go on wanting*; unflagging energy, unflagging spirits, unflagging interest in everybody and everything. Then there could never be this devastating weariness that makes one part of your brain go numb and dumb while another part shrieks "Go on, you dumb-bell!"

But . . . Not so fast! Hold everything! Isn't it just this very energy that keeps us everlastingly chasing ourselves upstairs?—That sooner or later

will burn us up to a cinder or flip us away like a squeezed orange?

Which is it—the energy that keeps us going, like a dry battery, or the keeping going that makes the energy, like a dynamo? Or both?

Clear the hall, I'm going to get highbrow. Watch me now. Einstein and Robeson haven't a thing on me when I get going.

I'm told, by the bald-headed old gentlemen with steel-rimmed spectacles and baggy trousers who supply us with knowledge in easily-digested tabloid form, that there's a condition, or state, or place known as Infinity.

We shall probably never (they tell me) be able to grasp what it is, because our minds are finite, and you can't get a quart into a pint pot.

(I know a stockbroker who succeeds several times a day in getting a quart into a pint body, but he's in rubber, so it doesn't count.)

Well, it seems to me there's a good deal of Infinity in human desire. It's a thing that can't, by its very nature, have any edges, or end, or limits. It's like a horizon. You never catch up with it, however fast and far you travel, and it's always changing as you approach it. If you grow, it grows. You can never grow tall enough to see beyond it.

You can either stand still and have it just as far away, or flounder towards it and . . . still have it just as far away. Doesn't seem to be much of a choice, does it?

But for me there's no choice. I've got to keep hunting horizons—not physical but mental ones.

*Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the Ranges—*

*Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for you.  
Go!*

Yes—but get to the top of the pass and you'll find that what's waiting for you is a path. To . . . ?

Wherever it goes we have to follow it; that's why I say I want everything.

And when I've got everything, what'll I want then, I wonder?

Masefield says "Death opens unknown doors." A great many doors have opened to me . . . and I've gone through . . . and been glad of it.





